AN

ESSAY

ON

MIRACLES.

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AN

ESSAY

In ANSWER to

Mr. *HUME*'s ESSAY

ON

MIRACLES.

By WILLIAM ADAMS, D. D.

Minister of ST. CHAD's, SALOP,

And Chaplain to the Lord Bishop of ST. ASAPH.

The THIRD EDITION, with Additions.

——— *it fumus ad auras.* VIRG.

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MDCCLXVII.

ERRATA.

Page 8. line 19. *for* of *read* or.
16 —— 5. *for* events *read* the events.
32 —— 9. *for* whoever *read* who ever.
47 —— 23. *dele* an.
77 —— 25. *for* miraculo *read* miracula.
115. *in the Note of reference, for* aſcal *read* Paſcal.

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By the AUTHOR of this Eſſay,

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AN

ESSAY, &c.

MR. *HUME* hath many of the talents of a fine writer, and hath juſtly obtained that character by the agreeable *Eſſays moral and political* *, with which he has obliged the world. What he hath wrote well will create a prejudice in favour of his errors; and theſe will have all their bad influence, when recommended by ſo able an advocate. The preſent is a ſubject of the greateſt importance, and the author expreſſes a particular ſatisfaction in his performance. Theſe are reaſons for conſidering

* The reader is deſired to diſtinguiſh betwixt this and the metaphyſical eſſays of this author, which is the book referred to throughout this treatiſe.

it carefully, and for guarding ourſelves againſt being deceived by the artifice or eloquence of the writer.

He begins with challenging, a little indirectly, the thanks of the public, for a diſcovery, which, he apprehends, will be of univerſal ſervice to mankind. This is nothing leſs than an infallible cure for ſuperſtition. "I "flatter myſelf," ſays he, "that I have diſ-"covered an argument, which, if juſt, will, "with the wiſe and learned, be an everlaſting "check to all kinds of ſuperſtitious deluſion, "and, conſequently, will be uſeful as long as "the world endures; for ſo long, I ſuppoſe, "will the accounts of miracles and prodigies "be found in all profane hiſtory *." The virtues of this ſpecifick are ſuch, that it exterminates all religions alike; as he ſhews, by trying its ſtrength upon the *Chriſtian*, which, where it prevails, is, perhaps, more obſtinate and hard of cure than any other. Here, however, it has been known to fail. I have given it a fair trial, and known it tried by others, without the leaſt effect, and think I can prove that

* *Philoſophical Eſſays concerning human underſtanding*, p. 174, firſt edition.

there

there is no one ingredient of any virtue or efficacy in it.

The ſecret itſelf is contained in the compaſs of a few lines: and therefore, to give ſome port and figure to it, the author has thought neceſſary to introduce it with ſome preliminary obſervations.

In the firſt of theſe, his meaning ſeems to be to lay down this as a principle — that all our reaſonings concerning matter of fact are founded wholly on experience: "Tho' experience "be our only guide in reaſoning concerning "matters of fact, it muſt be acknowledged, "that this guide is not altogether infallible, "but in ſome caſes is apt to lead us into errors "and miſtakes. One, who in our climate "ſhould expect better weather in any week of "*June* than in one of *December*, would reaſon "juſtly and conformable to experience; but "'tis certain, that he may happen in the event "to find himſelf miſtaken. However, we may "obſerve, that in ſuch a caſe he would have "no cauſe to complain of experience; be-"cauſe it commonly informs us before-hand "of the uncertainty, by that contrariety of

" events which we may learn from a diligent " obſervation *." In illuſtrating this obſervation, both here and elſewhere, he ſeems to confine it to ſuch events as are future: " An " hundred inſtances or experiments on one " ſide, and fifty on another, afford a very " doubtful expectation of any event; tho' an " hundred uniform experiments, with only " one contradictory one, do reaſonably beget " a very ſtrong degree of aſſurance †." Here then I readily allow, that in reaſoning concerning future contingencies experience is the beſt guide we have, tho' in many caſes, as will hereafter be ſeen, a very uncertain one.

This obſervation is followed by a prudent caution. " A wiſe man," he tells us, " pro- " portions his belief to the evidence. In ſuch " concluſions as are founded on an infallible " experience he expects the event with the laſt " degree of aſſurance, and regards his paſt ex- " perience as a full proof of the future ex- " iſtence of that event. In other caſes he pro- " ceeds with more caution: he weighs the " oppoſite experiments; he conſiders which " ſide is ſupported by the greateſt number of

* *Philoſophical Eſſays*, p. 174. † P. 175.

" experi-

" experiments; to that ſide he inclines, with " doubt and heſitation; and, when at laſt he " fixes his judgment, the evidence exceeds not " what we properly call probability. — In all " caſes we muſt ballance the oppoſite experi- " ments, where they are oppoſite, and deduct " the leſſer number from the greater, in order " to know the exact force of the ſuperior evi- " dence *." This logick is very juſt, and what, I am perſuaded, every man of the plaineſt underſtanding knows how to practiſe, without learning it from the ſchools, or from the author's refinements on the *curious and ſublime ſubject* (as he calls it) of probability †.

He then proceeds — " To apply theſe prin- " ciples to a particular inſtance: We may ob- " ſerve, there is no ſpecies of reaſoning more " common, more uſeful, and even neceſſary to " human life, than that derived from the teſti- " mony of men, and the reports of eye-wit- " neſſes and ſpectators. This ſpecies of reaſon- " ing perhaps one may deny to be founded on " the relation of cauſe and effect. I ſhall not " diſpute about a word. 'Twill be ſufficient

* P. 175. † *Eſſay on Probability*, p. 97.

" to obſerve, that our aſſurance, in any argu-
" ment of this kind, is derived from no other
" principle than our obſervation of the veracity
" of human teſtimony, and of the uſual con-
" formity of facts to the reports of witneſſes*."
'Tis difficult to ſay what the author would here exemplify, there being no clear connection betwixt this and the preceding paragraphs. But, if I may preſume to explain it, his argument ſtands thus: The principle he ſet out with, was, that our reaſoning about matters of fact depends wholly upon experience. This he hath proved concerning ſuch events as are future: he now wants to prove the ſame concerning facts that are paſt. Here he is aware, that, beſides experience, we have another guide, which is the teſtimony of hiſtory, that of witneſſes, *&c.* Theſe he does not chuſe to diſtinguiſh from the former, but inſinuates, that the evidence of teſtimony is included in that of experience, or that every argument from teſtimony is only an argument from experience, for as much as the truth of that depends ultimately upon this†. "The ultimate ſtandard," he

* P. 176.

† It may with more propriety be ſaid, that the evidence of experience is included in that of teſtimony, than

he tells us below, " by which we determine " diſputes of this kind, is always derived from " experience and obſervation." Now it is true, that the evidence of teſtimony muſt be reſolved at laſt into experience: but this experience is of a ſpecies entirely diſtinct from that on which the natural probability of any fact atteſted reſts: nor does it conſiſt, as this author aſſerts, in our *obſervation of the veracity of human teſtimony, and of the uſual conformity of facts with the reports of witneſſes.* It is built upon other principles, to which the author himſelf leads us in the words that follow: " Did not men's imagination na- " turally follow their memory — had they not " commonly an inclination to truth, and a ſenti- " ment of probity—were they not ſenſible to " ſhame, when detected in a falſehood—Were " not theſe, I ſay, diſcovered by experience to " be qualities inherent in human nature, we

than the contrary. Our own experience reaches around and goes back but a little way. But the experience of others, upon which we chiefly depend, is derived to us wholly from hiſtory and tradition, that is, from teſtimony. And it is obvious to obſerve, that, in a queſtion of fact, the teſtimony of negative witneſſes how many ſoever, is, for the moſt part, no evidence at all; while poſitive teſtimony muſt, more or leſs, have its weight.

" ſhould never repoſe the leaſt confidence in " human teſtimony *." The firſt of theſe motives I do not underſtand. Of the reſt I ſhall obſerve, that their force we collect, not ſo much from our obſervation of other men, as from our own feeling, and a conſciouſneſs of what paſſes within our own breaſt. We perceive in ourſelves, that a love and reverence for truth is natural to the mind of man: and the ſame ſelf-experience teaches us, that there are certain other principles in human nature, by which the veracity of men may be tried, and the truth of teſtimony be often put out of doubt, as will be hereafter ſeen.

The next obſervation is, that, " as the evi- " dence derived from witneſſes and human teſti- " mony is founded on paſt experience, ſo it " varies with the experience, and is regarded " either as a proof of probability, according as " the conjunction betwixt any particular kind " of report and any kind of objects has been " found to be conſtant or variable †." Here again the author's meaning is loſt in a thicket of words, which it is difficult for a common eye to penetrate. Let the reader try what he

* P. 177. † Ibid.

can

can make of the *conjunction varying betwixt any particular report and any kind of objects.* The credibility of an hiſtorical fact depends upon the credibility of the fact itſelf, and that of the hiſtorian or witneſſes who relate it. Theſe ſhould be always conſidered diſtinctly; tho' the author, for reaſons of his own, chuſes to confound them. The latter of theſe depends in part upon principles that are fixed and invariable, ſuch as thoſe the author has juſt mentioned, which are general principles of human nature; and in part too on the perſonal character of the relator, the intereſt he has in the fact related, and other circumſtances. As theſe circumſtances vary, the evidence varies, and the fact becomes more or leſs credible. And ſo, concerning the natural credibility of the fact, this is greater or leſs, according as our own, and the obſervation of others, in caſes of a ſimilar nature, has been more or leſs uniform. Something like this I take to be the author's meaning in this place: and this is the amount of all that follows in this and the next paragraph. My deſign, therefore, in this remark, is, not to conteſt the author's principles, which, as far as I underſtand them, are right enough; but to ſhew that his ſtyle and manner of writ-

ing tend to embarraſs the ſubject, and perplex the reader.

We are now coming nearer to the matter in queſtion. " Suppoſe," ſays the author, " that " the fact, which the teſtimony endeavours to " eſtabliſh, partakes of the extraordinary and " the marvellous; in that caſe, the evidence " reſulting from the teſtimony receives a dimi- " nution, greater or leſs, in proportion as the " fact is more or leſs unuſual.——When the " fact atteſted is ſuch a one as has ſeldom fallen " under our obſervation, here is a conteſt of " two oppoſite experiences; of which the one " deſtroys the other, as far as its force goes, " and the ſuperior can only operate on the " mind by the force which remains. The very " ſame principle of experience, which gives " us a certain degree of aſſurance in the teſti- " mony of witneſſes, gives us alſo, in this caſe, " another degree of aſſurance againſt the fact " which they endeavour to eſtabliſh *." Here the author ſeems to ſuppoſe, that a want of experience, in any caſe, is the ſame with experiencing the contrary. *When a fact atteſted hath ſeldom fallen under our obſervation,* " *here is,*" ſays he,

* P. 179.

he, " *a conteſt of two oppoſite experiences:*" but, in reality, here is no experience at all; only a fact not obſerved on one ſide, and poſitive evidence, or the fact atteſted, on the other — a very unequal conteſt! as we ſhall preſently ſee; the ſlighteſt poſitive teſtimony being, for the moſt part, an over-ballance to the ſtrongeſt negative evidence that can be produced. I grant, however, all that the author's argument requires, *viz.* that experience teaches us, of many things, that they are improbable, and not to be haſtily believed; of others, that they are naturally incredible: but theſe are ſo, not becauſe they are unuſual or unobſerved, but becauſe there is a known diſproportion betwixt the cauſe aſſigned and the effect, or becauſe the fact aſſerted is a contradiction to ſome known and univerſal truth.

Theſe premiſes he now draws to a point, and makes them center in one concluſive argument againſt miracles: " To increaſe the " probability againſt the teſtimony of witneſ- " ſes, let us ſuppoſe, that the fact which they " affirm, inſtead of being only marvellous, is " really miraculous; and ſuppoſe alſo, that " the teſtimony, conſidered apart and in itſelf,

" amounts

" amounts to an entire proof: in that caſe, " there is proof againſt proof, of which the " ſtrongeſt muſt prevail, but ſtill with a di- " minution of its force in proportion to that of " its antagoniſt *." I have juſt allowed, that there are facts which experience aſſures us are wholly incredible: but of theſe I ſhall aſſert, that no good teſtimony can be produced in their favour. Truth is always conſiſtent with itſelf; and no one truth can ever be contradicted by another. The author is, therefore, too kind in ſuppoſing that miracles may admit of full proof from teſtimony. I ſhall take no advantage of this conceſſion, but readily acknowledge, that, if they are proved *à priori* to be incredible, it will be a vain attempt to prove them by teſtimony. Let us ſee, then, what the author alledges in bar of this proof. His batteries are now mounted, and he begins the attack.

" A miracle," ſays he, " is a violation of " the laws of nature; and, as a firm and un- " alterable experience hath eſtabliſhed theſe " laws, the proof againſt a miracle, from the " nature of the fact, is as entire as any ar- " gument from experience can poſſibly be

* P. 179.

" imagined.

" imagined. Why is it more than probable, " that all men muſt die—that lead cannot by " itſelf remain ſuſpended in the air—that fire " conſumes wood, and is extinguiſhed by water " — unleſs it be, that theſe events are found " agreeable to the laws of nature, and there is " required a violation of theſe laws, or, in " other words, a miracle, to prevent them? " Nothing is eſteemed a miracle, if it ever hap- " pens in the common courſe of nature. 'Tis " no miracle, that a man in ſeeming good " health ſhould die of a ſudden; becauſe ſuch " a kind of death, tho' more unuſual than any " other, has yet been frequently obſerved to " happen: but 'tis a miracle, that a dead man " ſhould come to life; becauſe that hath ne- " ver been obſerved in any age or country. " There muſt, therefore, be an uniform expe- " rience againſt every miraculous event, other- " wiſe the event would not merit the appella- " tion. And, as an uniform experience amounts " to a proof, there is here a direct and full " proof, from the nature of the fact, againſt " the exiſtence of any miracle: nor can ſuch " a proof be deſtroyed, or the miracle ren- " der'd credible, but by an oppoſite proof that " is ſuperior *."

* P. 180.

I have

I have endeavoured to preſerve the ſtrength of this argument entire, by collecting every thing that is of any import to it in the obſervations that precede it: and, that the reader may ſee it in its ſtrongeſt light, I ſhall here repeat it, as it is again ſumm'd up by the author at the end of his Eſſay:

" It appears, that no teſtimony for any kind " of miracle can ever amount to a probability, " much leſs to a proof; and that, even ſup- " poſing it amounted to a proof, 'twould be " oppoſed by another proof, derived from the " very nature of the fact which it would en- " deavour to eſtabliſh. 'Tis experience alone " which gives authority to human teſtimony; " and 'tis the ſame experience which aſſures us " of the laws of nature. When, therefore, " theſe two kinds of experience are contrary, " we have nothing to do but ſubtract the one " from the other, and embrace an opinion, " either on the one ſide or the other, with " that aſſurance which ariſes from the re- " mainder. But, according to the principle " here explained, this ſubtraction, with regard " to all popular religions, amounts to an entire " annihilation: and therefore we may eſtabliſh

" it as a maxim, that no human teſtimony can
" have ſuch force as to prove a miracle, and
" make it a juſt foundation for any ſuch ſyſtem
" of religion *."

This is the author's great diſcovery. The whole ſecret is out. And here one cannot but wonder to ſee a poſition, which is laid down by all that write in defence of miracles, pleaded as a deciſive argument againſt them, and to find the experience of all mankind brought in evidence againſt all the religions of the world. An experienced uniformity in the courſe of nature hath been always thought neceſſary to the belief and uſe of miracles. Theſe are indeed relative ideas. There muſt be an ordinary regular courſe of nature, before there can be any thing extraordinary. A river muſt flow, before its ſtream can be interrupted. It is ſtrange, therefore, that this uniformity, which is implied in the nature of a miracle, ſhould at the ſame time be inconſiſtent with it. This is to ſuppoſe, that the exiſtence of a miracle is a contradiction in terms; and as ſuch indeed the author ſeems to treat it: " A miracle ſup-
" ported by any human teſtimony is more

* P. 198.

" properly

" properly a ſubject of deriſion than of argu-
" ment *:" And again, " What have we
" to oppoſe to ſuch a cloud of witneſſes, but the
" abſolute impoſſibility or miraculous nature of
" events †?" A modeſt reader can ſcarce look ſuch aſſurance as this in the face: he will be apt to miſtruſt his own apprehenſion, and think there is more in theſe big words than he readily ſees. The firſt reading gave me ſuſpicions of this kind; but, having recovered myſelf, and taken courage to review it, I fear not to aſſert, that all the experience the author can bring will amount to neither proof nor argument againſt the belief of miracles. Let him, if he pleaſes, plead his own experience—that he has never ſeen or been witneſs to any miracle—that he has always found the courſe of nature to be the ſame and unchanged: but does this experience teach him, that the laws of nature are neceſſary and immutable—that there is no power in being ſufficient to ſuſpend or alter them—or that there can be no reaſons to induce ſuch a power to act? 'Till one or other of theſe can be proved from experience, it is no evidence in the preſent caſe, and, inſtead of deciding the matter in queſtion, is

* P. 194. † P. 195.

wholly

wholly impertinent and foreign to it. Can the ſouthern climates experience that there is no froſt in the north? Or, can Mr. *Hume* experience that I have never ſeen fire kindled by a touch from ice? This negative evidence, tho' multiplied infinitely, would ſtill be negative: and the fact laſt mentioned might be true, and capable of very eaſy proof from teſtimony, as I ſhall preſently ſhew, though all the world ſhould agree that they had never ſeen the like.

The uniformity of nature is no way impeached or brought in queſtion by the ſuppoſition of miracles. The concurring teſtimony of mankind to the courſe of nature is not contradicted by thoſe who have experienced contrary appearances in a few inſtances. The idea of a miracle unites and reconciles theſe ſeeming differences. By ſuppoſing the facts in queſtion to be miraculous, the uniformity of nature is preſerved, and the facts are accounted for upon another principle entirely conſiſtent with it. Thus, experience teacheth us that lead and iron are heavier than water: but a man, by projecting theſe heavy bodies, may make them ſwim in water, or fly in air. Should the ſame be done by any

 inviſible

inviſible power, it would be a miracle. But the uniformity of nature is no more diſturbed in this caſe than the former: nor is the general experience, which witneſſes to the ſuperior gravity of theſe bodies, any proof that they may not be raiſed in air and water by ſome inviſible agent, as well as by the power of man. All that experience teaches is the comparative weight of theſe bodies. If, therefore, they are ſeen to float in mediums lighter than themſelves, this muſt be the effect of art or ſtrength: but, if it be done without any viſible art or power, it muſt be done then by ſome art or power that is inviſible; that is, it muſt be miraculous. This is the proceſs by which we infer the exiſtence of miracles; which is, therefore, ſo far from being contradicted by that experience upon which the laws of nature are eſtabliſhed, that it is cloſely connected and ſtands in the faireſt agreement with it.

The queſtion then will remain—Whether any ſuch inviſible agents have ever interpoſed in producing viſible effects? Againſt the *poſſibility* of this, tho' the author is pleaſed to pronounce it impoſſible, he hath offered no argument (and, indeed, none can poſſibly be offered): Againſt the

credibility of it, the experience which he pleads is no argument at all. This experience proves a courſe of nature; but, whether this is ever interrupted, is ſtill a queſtion. This experience teaches what may be ordinarily expected from common cauſes, and in the common courſe of things: but miraculous interpoſitions, which we are enquiring after, are, by their nature and eſſence, extraordinary and out of the common courſe of nature. Miracles, if at all, are effects of an extraordinary power upon extraordinary occaſions: conſequently, common experience can determine nothing concerning them. That ſuch occaſions may ariſe, both in the natural and moral world, is eaſy to conceive. The greateſt of natural philoſophers * hath thought, that the frame of the world will want, in a courſe of time, the hand that made to retouch and refit it. The greateſt of moral philoſophers † hath thought it a reaſonable hope, that God would ſome time ſend a meſſenger from heaven to inſtruct men in the great duties of religion and morality.

* *Newton Opt.* ed. Lat. p. 346.

† *Socrates* in *Platonis* Alcibiade 2°, ſub finem.

As to the queſtion of *fact* — Whether any ſuch interpoſitions have been ever known or obſerved? this muſt be tried, like all other hiſtorical facts, by the teſtimony of thoſe who relate it, and the credit of the firſt witneſſes who have vouched it; and not, as this author would have it, by the teſtimony of others — of thoſe who lived in diſtant times and places. There is mention of a comet, a little before the *Achaian* war, which appeared as big as the ſun *. If this were well atteſted by the aſtronomers of that time, it would be trifling to object againſt it that the like had never been obſerved before or ſince. And juſt as pertinent is it to alledge the experience of ages and countries againſt miracles which are ſaid to be wrought in other times and other countries.

But, in truth, were the world to give evidence in the preſent queſtion, they would, I am perſuaded, depoſe very differently from what this author expects. A great part of mankind have given their teſtimony to the credibility of miracles: they have actually believed them. By this author's account, all the religions in the

* *Senecæ Nat. Quæſt.* lib. 7. cap. 15.

world

world have been founded upon this belief. If this be true, we have univerſal teſtimony to the credibility of miracles. How then can there be univerſal experience againſt them? The author tell us that we muſt judge of teſtimony by experience. It is more certain that we muſt judge of the experience of men by their teſtimony.

It is far from true that all religions have been founded on miracles. None but the *Chriſtian* and *Jewiſh* appear to be ſo founded. But there is a ſort of miracles, which men of all religions have agreed in believing. "A miracle," as this author ſays, "may be either diſcoverable by "men, or not. This alters not its nature and "eſſence *." Many things appear to us to be effected by natural means, the firſt ſprings of which may be moved by the immediate hand of God. But every ſuch interpoſition, in overruling or giving a new direction to the courſe of nature, is, as the author allows, miraculous. If then Providence ever interpoſes in puniſhing exemplary wickedneſs, or in the ſupport of eminent virtue—in averting evil, or beſtowing good—theſe are miracles. But theſe have been

* P. 181.

univerſally believed. Theſe bleſſings of heaven have been implored and acknowledged, and theſe judgments deprecated, in the publick and private prayers of mankind, from the beginning of the world to this time.

We cannot indeed argue, from theſe ſuppoſed interpoſitions, that therefore Providence will interpoſe in a viſible and ſenſible manner. But it follows, that ſuch interpoſitions are poſſible; it follows, that they are credible. If we believe theſe miraculous interpoſitions, when they do not appear to our ſenſes, what ſhould hinder us from believing the like upon the report of our ſenſes, or of credible perſons who give witneſs to them? If there are general reaſons for concealing theſe interpoſitions, may there not too be ſpecial reaſons for ſignalizing them at times to the ſenſes and notice of mankind? It is certain, that, if any ſuch reaſons can be aſſigned, all that is difficult of belief in miracles will be removed. Now, tho' we cannot indeed look into the counſels of Providence, nor, without preſumption, pronounce what is fit for God, in any ſuppoſed circumſtance, to do; yet, in judging of paſt facts or miracles that are queſtioned, we can readily ſee whether any great end, wor-

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thy of God, hath been anſwered by them: and if this appear to be the caſe, it will create a preſumption in their favour: and if, farther, it ſhall ſeem that this end could not have been compaſſed by any other means, this will amount to ſome proof of their reality.

To ſee this matter in the cleareſt light, it may be proper to conſider more diſtinctly the grounds of that credibility, which we allow, in different degrees, to hiſtorical facts. This depends, as I have ſaid, on the credibility of the facts themſelves, and on that of the hiſtorian or witneſſes who relate them.

The credibility of any fact in itſelf, as this author frequently tells us, depends upon its analogy with the known courſe of nature *. But the powers of nature are ſo imperfectly known to us, that in moſt caſes we argue with great uncertainty from this principle. A conſequence of this is, that teſtimony is, for the moſt part, of much greater force to eſtabliſh the truth of paſt facts, than experience. It would have been thought highly incredible a few years ago, that

* P. 165.

an animal might be propagated by cutting it in pieces—that you might, by dividing one living creature, give life to an hundred of the ſame ſpecies. Yet this ſort of *Hydra* has been diſcovered; and the fact, tho' contrary to the whole analogy of nature, was readily believed, when it had been experienced and teſtified by very few. In like manner, I have no doubt that the magnet loſes its polarity in very cold latitudes. I believe this upon the teſtimony of one man *, tho' the experience of travellers in all climates before atteſts the contrary. Here the moſt uniform experience is outweighed by a ſingle evidence. The reaſon is, that the experience of other countries is only a negative evidence in the queſtion. The experience was indeed, before the fact was tried, a very ſtrong preſumption againſt it. The moſt cautious ſailor would have ventured his fortune and life upon it. Yet is this preſumption of no weight in the queſtion of paſt fact, when compared with the ſlighteſt teſtimony †.

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* Mr. *Ellis*, in his account of the North-weſt Paſſage.

† Every propoſition or fact aſſerted is *certainly* true or falſe. By credible or probable we mean, not any thing real in the character of the propoſition or fact, but only its

In caſes where a ſufficient cauſe is aſſigned, an effect, however new and ſtrange, may become credible, or even probable, in itſelf, without any teſtimony to ſupport it. That fire ſhould be

its appearance to us, or to the perſon who eſtimates this credibility. A thing is ſaid to be credible, when it wants and is thought capable of proof — to be probable, when there appear more reaſons for than againſt believing it. *Credible* is more than *poſſible*, and *impoſſible* more than *incredible*. Again, *probable* is more than *credible*, and *incredible* is more than *improbable*. But theſe words are uſed in common language ſomewhat promiſcuouſly. Thus, what is highly probable is ſaid to be highly credible, and what is very improbable to be very incredible. Hence, there are all degrees of incredible and credible, before you arrive at probability. After this, credible and probable are the ſame, and admit again of all degrees, 'till you arrive at moral certainty. The ſame thing then may be credible in all theſe different degrees to different perſons. That the earth is round—that it is conſtantly ſpinning about like a top, and travelling with a very ſwift motion, while the ſun and the heavens ſtand ſtill—This to one part of mankind is wholly incredible, and to another morally certain. The credibility, therefore, or comparative incredibility of any fact is, for the moſt part, too looſe a bottom to ground any argument or inference upon. The ſame teſtimony may likewiſe be variouſly credible to different perſons. But the evidence of this is far more diſtinct, and its force more eaſily aſcertained. The truth of teſtimony, where it is doubtful, may

be kindled by a touch from ice, is contrary to the experience of ſome thouſand years. But electricity is a cauſe given equal to the effect. From

may be proved many different ways: that of doubtful facts can be made clear only by teſtimony, which is indeed, after all, the proper proof of facts.

Experience is the general teſtimony of mankind to general truths. Teſtimony, as it is here oppoſed to experience, is the atteſtation of particular perſons to particular facts; the former of theſe witneſſes to the credibility of facts; the latter gives evidence directly to their reality or exiſtence. From the former we collect, that *May* is on this ſide the line a warmer month than *December:* but the certainty of this in particular inſtances is only to be proved, and the contrary may be proved, from the latter. We may indeed, as I have granted, in ſome caſes, infer from the former of theſe the certainty or impoſſibility of facts. But even here this limitation or condition is always underſtood—that we know the whole of the caſe—that no cauſe intervenes, which is unknown or does not appear to us. And therefore, in the ſtrongeſt caſes that can be ſuppoſed, experience is no bar to the evidence of teſtimony; becauſe it is very poſſible, in almoſt all caſes, that ſuch cauſe may intervene. Should I ſee a ſtone climb up hill, or a piece of ſolid iron ſwim in water, I could not doubt the fact, how incredible ſoever in itſelf. Suppoſe the ſame to reſt upon the teſtimony of others: I cannot, indeed, ſee with the eyes of other men; but I can ſee that they have eyes, as well as myſelf: and, if

From this time then the fact becomes credible, and even probable, tho' it were not tried and proved by any one witneſs.

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if their veracity is proved, as I aſſert it may, even to our eyes and ſenſes, (I mean, by ſenſible and viſible facts) I have then nearly as good evidence for the fact, as if I had ſeen it myſelf. I might perhaps conclude, that the effect was produced by ſome inviſible agent; but, whether this can be diſcovered or not, the fact muſt ſtill be admitted. All this is unwarily allowed by the author himſelf, in terms as ſtrong as can be deſired: "Suppoſe all authors in all languages agree, that from "the firſt of *January*, 1600, there was a total dark- "neſs over the whole earth for eight days: Suppoſe "that the tradition of this extraordinary event is ſtill "ſtrong and lively among the people; that all travel- "lers, who return from foreign countries, bring us ac- "counts of the ſame tradition, without the leaſt va- "riation or contradiction: 'Tis evident, that our pre- "ſent philoſophers, inſtead of doubting of that fact, "ought to receive it for certain, and ought to ſearch "for the cauſes whence it might be derived." P. 199.

The author of the *Free Inquiry into the miraculous Powers of the primitive Church* has ſtated this matter in a very different light. He ſuppoſes, that we have the evidence of ſenſe for the natural credibility of facts, and ſeems to infer, that, when we argue from hence, we go upon ſurer ground than when we argue from teſtimony, which he repreſents as ever dark and doubtful, and amounting only to a reaſonable preſumption,

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In moral or intelligent agents we look for moral cauſes—for reaſons or motives to induce them to act, as well as for the natural powers of

at beſt: the contrary to which, in almoſt every particular, is, I think, the truth. As the principles laid down by this author are very general, and may be eaſily miſapplied, beyond his intention, in the preſent queſtion, it will not be improper to compare them with what has been ſaid. "The queſtion concerning theſe "miraculous powers depends," ſays he, "upon the "joint credibility of the facts pretended to have been "produced, and of the witneſſes who atteſt them: if "either part be infirm, their credit muſt ſink in pro-"portion, and, if the facts eſpecially be incredible, muſt "of courſe fall to the ground, becauſe no force of teſ-"timony can alter the nature of things. The credibi-"lity of facts lies open to the trial of our reaſon and "ſenſes: but the credibility of witneſſes depends on a "variety of principles wholly concealed from us; and, "tho' in many caſes it may reaſonably be preſumed, "yet in none can it certainly be known: for it is com-"mon with men, out of crafty and ſelfiſh views, to "diſſemble and deceive: but plain facts cannot delude "us—cannot ſpeak any other language, or give any "other information, than that of truth. The teſti-"mony, therefore, of facts, as it is offer'd to our ſenſes, "carries with it the ſureſt inſtruction in all caſes, "which God, in the ordinary courſe of his providence, "has thought fit to appoint for the guidance of human "life.

of acting. And, where both a final and efficient cauſe appear equal to the effect, the effect, however ſtrange in itſelf, will become credible by

" life *." In anſwer to which, I ſhall not deny that the credibility of facts may in many caſes be tried by our ſenſes; but this is generally learnt from experience, or the common teſtimony of mankind: And, 2dly, this credibility, however learnt or proved, is no direct evidence of the reality or exiſtence of any doubtful fact; ſince the fact may be highly credible, and yet never exiſt —may be in a great degree incredible, and yet certainly true. What the author calls *the teſtimony of facts offered to our ſenſes* is in this caſe only the teſtimony of our ſenſes, or that of other men, to the exiſtence, not of the fact in queſtion, but of other facts that are ſuppoſed analogous or ſimilar to it; which, tho' in many caſes it may amount to a very high preſumption, yet is *in none a direct proof of any doubtful fact:* Whereas, 3dly, teſtimony is a direct evidence to the exiſtence or reality, not of ſimilar facts, but of the fact itſelf: and therefore, in judging of paſt or diſtant facts, where we cannot have the evidence of our ſenſes, the teſtimony of thoſe who have this evidence is, not only the ſureſt, but the only *method of inſtruction which Providence has appointed for our guidance thro' life.* All that we *certainly know* of ſuch facts is derived from this ſource. The truth of teſtimony is always preſumed, where there are no particular reaſons to ſuſpect it. This preſumption alone will give more weight, as we have ſeen, to a ſingle teſ-

* Preface, p. 9.

timony,

by teſtimony, if not probable without it. It is poſſible for a man to ſwim acroſs the *Helleſpont*. The poſſibility of this fact will make it credible upon ſufficient teſtimony: but, if a competent reaſon is aſſigned for this hazardous enterprize (ſuch as the eſcaping certain death) this will make it credible upon the ſlighteſt teſtimony, or even probable without any.

The reſult then is — that whatever is poſſible, or in the loweſt degree credible, is capable of a proof from teſtimony—that the ſtrongeſt preſumption from experience is of

timony, and make it better evidence for the truth of facts, than a very high degree of preſumption drawn from analogy is againſt it. 4thly, This preſumption may be increaſed to any degree by the concurrence of other teſtimony; which concurrence too is itſelf a diſtinct proof of the fact atteſted. Laſtly, The veracity of every ſingle witneſs may be proved by plain and indiſputable facts, as will be ſeen more fully hereafter. If then improbable or incredible facts require ſtronger evidence to ſupport them, the weight of teſtimony may be increaſed, and the proofs that ſupport it multiplied, infinitely; and, conſequently, whatever is not abſolutely impoſſible may be thus proved. The force of teſtimony cannot indeed *alter the nature of things:* but it can make things improbable become probable — it can give credibility, and even certainty, to things that were before incredible.

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little force againſt poſitive evidence—and that, where a cauſe is aſſigned equal to any effect, the event is rendered credible upon common teſtimony, and ſometimes probable without any.

But there are, it is granted, many caſes, which we may, from nature and experience, pronounce to be impoſſible. It is impoſſible that a fact or propoſition ſhould be true, when the cauſe aſſigned is unequal to the effect. Now, the proportion of cauſes to effects, the natural powers of agents, and the force of moral cauſes on the mind, we know to a good degree, from experience. If we cannot preciſely determine the force of natural agents, we can, in moſt caſes, aſſign limits which they cannot paſs. For inſtance: We cannot preciſely mark out the bounds of human power; but we can, in all caſes, ſay to what it does not extend. If the ſtrength of men, at a medium, be equal to one, that of king *Auguſtus* or *Hercules* may be equal to two; but it cannot be equal to two hundred. A phyſician may reſtore a dying man to health; but he cannot reſtore a dead man to life. Of all ſuch events, as raiſing the dead, calming the winds or ſeas, curing diſeaſes with a word, we

may

may fairly pronounce, that they are impoſſible to human ſtrength, and therefore, when imputed to it, are incredible; becauſe a force equal to two cannot produce an effect equal to two hundred. In this caſe experience decides with ſufficient authority againſt the fact. And this, I ſuppoſe, the author miſtook for an argument againſt miracles.

But whoever attributed theſe facts to human power? Thoſe who record, and thoſe who believe, miracles, univerſally aſcribe them to a power ſuperior to man. They agree, that they far exceed all human ſtrength, and therefore are an argument of the concurrence and agency of ſome ſuperior power. Againſt the interpoſition of ſuch ſuperior power, experience, as we have ſeen, can determine nothing. If common experience does not atteſt or acknowledge ſuch interpoſitions, the anſwer is given—common occaſions do not call for them. The common wants of nature are provided for by the common courſe of nature. Extraordinary occaſions only can call for extraordinary interpoſitions. Of theſe occaſions we are not the proper judges: but, that many ſuch may ariſe in the

the government of free agents, ſeems obvious even to us.

If men, by a bad uſe of their liberty, ſhould ſink themſelves into a moral incapacity of anſwering the ends of their creation—If they ſhould loſe ſight of God and religion and all the great motives to holineſs and virtue, and this evil ſhould become general and paſt all natural hopes of recovery—it is very ſuppoſeable that God may interpoſe, by a ſpecial act of his Providence, in reſtoring them to a capacity of ſerving him, and of attaining that happineſs for which they were created. If virtue, and that knowledge which is neceſſary to it, are worthy the care of Providence — and if theſe were in danger of periſhing out of the world——why ſhould it be thought incredible that God ſhould ſend a righteous man to teach the doctrines and enforce the duties of religion, with a clear and expreſs authority? This miſſion of a prophet would be miraculous: but the miracle would not appear; and therefore other miracles would be neceſſary to atteſt its truth. Superior knowledge and virtue are not ſufficient to characterize a prophet: he muſt do ſuch things as no man can do, except God were with him,

before his miſſion or character will be acknowledged for divine. Here then is a reaſon, which, whenever it can be pleaded, will make miracles every way credible, and as capable of proof from teſtimony as any matter of fact whatſoever.

In the examination of paſt facts, if no ſuch end appears to have been anſwered by the miracles alledged, this will be a ſtrong preſumption againſt them. On the other hand, if any great conſequences have followed—if, for inſtance, it ſhould appear from hiſtory, that natural religion had, when loſt, by the help of theſe miracles, been revived in all its purity, and eſtabliſhed in many nations as the will of God—this will be a ſtrong preſumption in their favour: And, if there appear no other aſſignable cauſe, which could give birth to this great event, but the miracles pretended, this will be a good proof of their reality.

We come next to conſider the credibility derived to facts from teſtimony. This depends in general upon the principles of human nature, which we can argue with the more certainty from, becauſe we experience them in ourſelves,

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as well as obſerve them in others. We are made naturally to love truth, and to hate and abhor falſhood and deceit. The ſhame of being detected in a lye, and the reproach that ever follows it, is a full proof of this. Even in matters of no moment, in the moſt tranſient diſcourſe, where men think it unneceſſary to attend to what they ſay, were there no temptation from vanity or a deſire of pleaſing, they would never deviate from truth. But this principle will operate far more ſtrongly, where men are called upon to attend, have leiſure to conſider, and give their teſtimony deliberately: it will operate more ſtrongly on good men than bad —in caſes of great moment than in matters of indifference.

Could we be abſolutely certain, in any caſe, that a man had no intereſt, real or ſuppoſed, in deceiving—that he had no motive to deceive—we might depend with abſolute certainty upon the truth of his evidence. Now, this aſſurance we may have from circumſtances that cannot deceive us. Incapable as we are of penetrating into all the reſerves and receſſes of the human mind, there is yet a certain and infallible teſt, by which the veracity of men may in many

caſes be tried. For example: If the perſon atteſting gives up every known intereſt for the ſake of his teſtimony, without any known proſpect of advantage — if he is expoſed by it to preſent ſufferings, and is threaten'd with yet greater — if he perſiſts under all the diſcouragements that can be thought of, and goes through a long ſeries of evils, which, by receding from his teſtimony, he might prevent—and, laſtly, if he gives up life itſelf for a painful and ignominious death — this is ſuch a proof of ſincerity as cannot be reſiſted. In this caſe, we are not only aſſured that the witneſs is free from every corrupt biaſs, but that he has the higheſt regard for truth. Nothing but a conſcious ſenſe of this, with the hope of a future reward from the God of truth, can ſupport men under a loſs of all things, and under the actual ſuffering of all the evils of life. A good man may give up his intereſt for the ſake of truth: a bad man will ſacrifice truth to intereſt: but no man will give up intereſt and truth together for nothing, or for the ſake of falſhood, which is worſe than nothing.

The maxims we here argue from are the moſt certain and uncontroverted of any in morality

rality—That men act from motives, and that good, real or apparent, is the object, the motive and aim of every action. The laws by which the moral world is governed are as certain and infallible as those of the natural. The paſſions, appetites, and ſenſes of mankind act, and are acted upon, with as much uniformity as any powers and principles in nature. That men ſhould love falſhood rather than truth — that they ſhould chuſe labour and travail, ſhame and miſery, before pleaſure, eaſe, and eſteem—is as much a violation of the laws of nature, as it is for lead or iron to hang unſupported in the air, or for the voice of a man to raiſe the dead to life: but this, I have granted to the author, is, not miraculous, but impoſſible, and ſhall therefore have his leave, I hope, to aſſert, that falſhood, thus atteſted, is impoſſible—in other words, that teſtimony, thus tried and proved, is infallible and certain.

It remains, indeed, that witneſſes the moſt upright and unſuſpected may be miſtaken in their teſtimony: they may be deceived themſelves; and therefore their teſtimony, even thus proved, is not to be ſecurely relied on. But, happily, miracles, at leaſt all that we diſpute

with this author, are of ſuch a nature, that it is impoſſible to be deceived about them. Facts that are viſible and palpable to the ſenſes of mankind, that are done in open day-light, that lie open to ſcrutiny and obſervation for a long time together, preſent witneſſes muſt know whether they ſee or not. They who report them as eye-witneſſes cannot be deceived themſelves in the belief of them, however they may intend to deceive others.

I conclude then, that miracles, when there appears a ſufficient cauſe for working them, are credible in themſelves — that, when they come under the cognizance of our ſenſes, they are proper matter of teſtimony, and, when atteſted by witneſſes who have ſufficient opportunities of convincing themſelves, and give ſufficient proof of their conviction, have a right to command our faith.

And here I accept the author's alternative, without complaining of the inſidious terms in which it is expreſſed. " The plain conſe-
" quence," ſays he, " is (and 'tis a general
" maxim worthy of our attention) that no teſ-
" timony is ſufficient to eſtabliſh a miracle,

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" unleſs the teſtimony be of ſuch a kind, that " its falſhood would be more miraculous than " the fact which it endeavours to eſtabliſh: " and even in that caſe there is a mutual de- " ſtruction of arguments, and the ſuperior " only gives us an aſſurance ſuitable to that " degree of force which remains after deduct- " ing the inferior.—— If the falſhood of any " perſon's teſtimony would be more miracu- " lous than the event which he relates, then, " and not 'till then, can he pretend to com- " mand my belief or opinion *." By miracu- lous it is plain that the author here means, in the popular ſenſe of the word, wonderful or in- credible. I aſſert then, that miracles may be made ſo credible by circumſtances and con- curring facts, and ſo ſupported by teſtimony, that, if we reject them, we muſt believe things more incredible, or, as the author would have us ſpeak, more miraculous than the miracles themſelves.

The miracles I ſhall mention are thoſe in the *Chriſtian* Goſpel—healing the ſick without any viſible means, giving ſight to the blind, raiſing the dead to life, *&c.* all which are ſaid

* P. 182.

to be performed by the power of God for ends the moſt worthy of himſelf, *viz.* to reſtore religion and morality to their true principles, and to eſtabliſh the practice of them in the world. The character of thoſe who were appointed to this work, and the doctrines which they taught, correſpond perfectly with this deſign: great as it was, they undertook it with alacrity and confidence, declaring from the beginning that their commiſſion was to go and teach all nations: the miracles which they atteſt, as giving authority to their doctrine, they aſſert from their own knowledge, as what they ſaw with their eyes, and handled with their hands: the number of theſe facts, and the numbers atteſting them, were very great: they concurred, without variation, in the ſame doctrine, and in the ſame teſtimony: they ſubmitted, with the ſame courage and conſtancy, to the greateſt perſecutions and afflictions, in confirmation of their truth; and, when called to it (as many of them were) laid down their lives for its ſake: they foreſaw from the beginning the oppoſition they met with, and foretold, with the fulleſt aſſurance, their ſucceſs againſt it: and the event juſtified their predictions;

the religion they taught was in a ſhort time eſtabliſhed in a great part of the world.

Here, now, the attempt itſelf, if not ſpirited and ſupported by truth, is wholly ſtrange and unaccountable. That men of low birth and education ſhould conceive a deſign of new-modelling the religion of all nations, and reforming their manners, by the laws of temperance, purity, and charity — that bad men ſhould concur in an end ſo great and godlike, or good men in means ſo impious as fraud and impoſture — that men of craft or addreſs ſhould chuſe for the hero of their ſtory one who was chronicled as a malefactor, and who had been put to death by the conſent of a whole people — one, too, that had abuſed their confidence, and miſled them by falſe hopes into an endleſs train of miſeries — all this is contrary to nature, and therefore, by the author's rule, impoſſible.

The zeal with which they carried on this deſign, traverſing ſeas and kingdoms, without reſt, and without wearineſs — a zeal which could not be exceeded by the moſt righteous men in the moſt righteous cauſe — this, if not prompted by

duty and a ſtrong conviction of the truths they taught, is ſtill more incredible.

The excellency of the religion they taught, in its worſhip and morality far ſurpaſſing all human wiſdom and philoſophy, and the ſole end of which is to make men honeſt, ſincere, and virtuous, if it be the work of ignorance and fraud, is equally ſtrange and myſterious.

The ſucceſs of this deſign is yet a greater miracle. In this chain of wonders the event is the moſt miraculous part. The eſtabliſhment of the Goſpel in an hundred different nations, its victory over *Jews* and *Gentiles*, over the power and policy of the wiſeſt and greateſt people, over the pride of learning and the obſtinacy of ignorance, over the prejudices of religion and thoſe of ſin and irreligion, is an event the moſt wonderful of any in hiſtory. But this is a miracle which we ſee before our eyes: it is a miraculous fact that muſt be aſcribed to a miraculous cauſe. Even granting the truth of the Goſpel miracles, the inſtruments in propagating it were ſo unequal to the work, that nothing but the power of God, accompanying and working

working with them, can account for its ſucceſs. It was ſtill a miracle that it ſhould proſper in their hands. But, without either truth or providence to ſupport it, this ſucceſs would be more than miraculous — it would be impoſſible.

The teſtimony directly given to theſe miracles is ſtrongly confirmed by the character of the witneſſes, who, as far as appears even from the teſtimony of their enemies, were unblameable in their lives and manners—men of conſcience and religion. Their writings breathe a ſpirit of piety, a zeal for God and good works, that is not equalled by any writings in the world: they carry in them ſuch marks of candor, truth, and ſimplicity, as cannot be imitated: all which can never conſiſt with the daring impiety of uſurping the moſt ſacred of all characters, and preaching a falſe religion to the world.

The numbers that engaged in this deſign, tho' diſperſed in different regions, agreed perfectly in the ſame report. It was in the power of any of theſe, or of the accomplices that muſt be concerned with them, to defeat the whole by diſcovering the fraud: and it cannot be,

be, that not one ſhould, by fear or intereſt, perſuaſion or torture, be prevailed on to diſcover it.

They put their teſtimony to the trial, by claiming a power of working miracles themſelves: they diſplayed this power frequently and publickly, and ſo ſubmitted their truth to the eyes and ſenſes of all about them. This pretence, if falſe, muſt have defeated the moſt probable and hopeful ſcheme; if true, it was no more than neceſſary to the difficulties of this. The event was — great numbers were every day converted to the faith. But this conduct cannot, any more than the event, be reconciled to the character or ſuppoſition of impoſture.

Laſtly, they gave the higheſt proof that can be given to the veracity of teſtimony, by going thro' the fiery trial of perſecution, in all its various forms of impriſonment, torture, and death. This began with the very beginning of Chriſtianity. They ſaw it evidently before their eyes, and plainly devoted themſelves from the firſt to a life of ſufferings and affliction. They gave up eaſe and ſecurity, country, kindred, family, and friends, to be treated every-where with

with contempt and contumely, to conflict with poverty and want, to be perſecuted from city to city, ſentenced to impriſonment and ſtripes, and, at laſt, to die by ſtoning, by the ſword, or the croſs. But this, in ſupport of falſhood and wrong, is ſo contrary to human nature, that it is abſolutely incredible.

The ſuppoſition then, that the miracles of the Goſpel are falſe, is full of wonders, prodigies, things unnatural, and which experience, the author's criterion in matters of fact, pronounces to be impoſſible.

And what now is that contrariety to nature, which is pleaded againſt the poſſibility of miracles? "A miracle," the author tells us, "may be accurately defined a tranſgreſſion of "a law of nature by a particular volition of the "Deity or by the interpoſal of ſome inviſible "agent *." But this definition is neither accurate nor conſiſtent with itſelf. The laws of nature are the laws of God: and, if God ſhould occaſionally change or invert any of theſe, there is no law, that I know of, againſt it — no law of God or nature broken by it. But, in fact,

* P. 181.

where

where miracles are ſuppoſed, there is no change made in theſe laws. I have ſhewn, that all that is unnatural in miracles is only appearance. There is nothing contrary to nature in ſuppoſing the dead to be raiſed, or the winds controlled by a power equal to the effect. It was no way contrary to the nature of God to reveal his will to mankind, in order to reform their corruptions, and to conduct them to virtue and happineſs. On the contrary, this might be piouſly hoped for from his wiſdom and goodneſs. It was no way contrary to the nature and condition of men. It appears from the hiſtory of mankind, that natural religion was at this time univerſally corrupted, and that no other probable means were left of reſtoring it. Reaſon and philoſophy had tried their ſtrength in vain. It was, therefore, on the part of man, highly expedient and deſireable. In fact, to this revelation, whether real or pretended, and to no other cauſe, it is owing, that the great truths of nature, concerning God, a Providence, and a future ſtate, are now ſo widely ſpread, and that half the world, inſtead of dumb idols, are ſerving the living God: and, if all the good ends, that might be expected, are not yet anſwered by it, yet the ſeed of the word is

ſown, the foundations of true religion are laid, and there is hope that it will in time enlarge its borders, and prevail, where it is received, with more effect and influence. It cannot be denied, that the Goſpel is an adequate proviſion for the wants, a remedy for all the infirmities of mankind. There is nothing, that can be wiſhed for in a rule of duty, that is not comprehended in it. The miracles, then, that atteſt it, are accounted for to our reaſon: we have God, the cauſe of all things, for their author: and a ſufficient reaſon is aſſigned for the divine interpoſition. And this will, at the ſame time, account for all the wonders that followed: the actions, ſufferings, and ſucceſs of the Apoſtles will, upon this ſcheme, appear eaſy, conſiſtent, and natural.

But, if this account be not admitted, theſe will remain ſo many contradictions to nature and experience, and it will lie upon the author to reconcile them to our belief. If the common motives to human actions, intereſt, paſſion, and prejudice, cannot be pleaded in an anſwer to theſe difficulties, what other account can be given of them? Some cauſe muſt be aſſigned adequate to the effect. For men to act without

motives

motives is as unnatural, as it is for a body to ſink without weight—to act againſt the force of motives is as contrary to nature, as it is for a ſtone to aſcend againſt the laws of gravity. Hear what this author ſays himſelf in another Eſſay: "We cannot make uſe of a "more convincing argument, than to prove "that the actions aſcribed to any perſon are "directly contrary to the courſe of nature, and "that no human motives, in ſuch circum-"ſtances, could ever induce him to ſuch a "conduct *."

The author tells us, that in this caſe we muſt reject the greater miracle. But miracle is too ſoft a name for theſe inconſiſtencies. Could he ſhew, that God, or ſome inviſible agent, had interpoſed in confounding the reaſon and underſtanding of all that preached or believed the Goſpel, in changing their nature, and giving a contrary direction to their paſſions, affections, and inſtincts, they would then be miracles, and proper objects of our belief. But this I ſhall preſume impoſſible to be proved, becauſe no end can be aſſigned for ſuch interpoſition, but merely to deceive mankind—an end ſo unwor-

* P. 135.

thy

thy of God, and contrary to the perfections of his nature, that we may pronounce it impoſſible for him to promote, or even to permit it to take effect.

Here, then, I may call upon the author, in his own words, to lay his hand upon his heart, and declare, whether the miracles of the Goſpel could poſſibly have been better atteſted, if true—whether there is any one condition wanting that can add credibility to them—whether there is any thing ſo contrary to nature in theſe miracles, as in the teſtimony given, and the belief gained, to them, if falſe—whether it is not eaſier to believe the miracles true, than that ſo many miraculous conſequences (a natural effect of true miracles) ſhould ariſe from them, if falſe—or, laſtly, whether it be not more credible that God ſhould work theſe miracles for ſo great an end as that of giving birth and eſtabliſhment to Chriſtianity, than that he ſhould work more and greater miracles to confound and deceive mankind. When he has ballanced his account of the impoſſibility of miracles with the evidence for thoſe of the Goſpel, and ſubtracted the former from the latter, *this*

ſubtraction will certainly amount to an entire annihilation.

Let us now ſee the poor caſe which the author puts at laſt to illuſtrate and crown his argument; "When any one tells me, that he ſaw "a dead man reſtored to life, I immediately "conſider with myſelf, whether it be more pro-"bable that this perſon ſhould either deceive "or be deceived, or that the fact he relates "ſhould really have happened: I weigh the one "miracle againſt the other, and, according to "the ſuperiority which I diſcover, I pronounce "my deciſion, and always reject the greater "miracle *." The author's argument requires him to prove, that no miracles, however circumſtanced, can be made credible by any teſtimony whatſoever. But, in the caſe ſuppoſed, the miracle has not one circumſtance to make it credible, nor the teſtimony one condition to confirm its truth. A dead man we may ſuppoſe raiſed to life without any reaſon, uſe, or end whatſoever: and a dead man may be raiſed for ſome extraordinary purpoſe of Providence, as to give authority and character to the ſpecial meſſengers of God. Now, tho'

* P. 182.

the

the former of theſe cannot be made credible by the naked teſtimony of one man, the latter may be made credible by the atteſtation of many, eſpecially, if they give proof, that they were neither deceived themſelves, nor intended to deceive others. Though one man, unaſſiſted, cannot lift a weight of twenty tuns, twenty men, with the help of engines, may lift the weight of one. I agree with the author, that, when a man is ſaid to riſe, like the ghoſt in *Prince Edward* *, only to ſet again, it is more credible, that the teſtimony is falſe, than the miracle true: but, when I ſee an effect worthy of Providence, in which the religion, virtue, and morality of a great part of mankind are concerned, brought about by the belief of this or ſuch-like miracles, and find, upon inquiry, that this miracle is atteſted by a great number of perſons who lived and died confeſſors and martyrs to it, the falſhood of ſuch teſtimony appears to me far more miraculous than ſuch a miracle.

The author puts the ſame caſe, with the addition of ſome particulars, in the ſecond part

* A late play, called *Edward the Black Prince.*

of his Eſſay: "Suppoſe that all the hiſtorians "who treat of *England* ſhould agree, that, on "the firſt of *January*, 1600, queen *Elizabeth* "died—that, both before and after her death, "ſhe was ſeen by her phyſicians and the whole "court, as is uſual with perſons of her rank— "that her ſucceſſor was acknowledged and "proclaimed by parliament — and that, after "having been interred a month, ſhe again ap- "peared, took poſſeſſion of the throne, and "governed *England* three years: I muſt confeſs "I ſhould be ſurprized at the concurrence of "ſo many odd circumſtances, but ſhould not "have the leaſt inclination to believe ſo mira- "culous an event *." Here, again, the fact ſuppoſed is the ſtrangeſt and moſt unaccountable that the author could well conceive, becauſe no final cauſe appears to make it in any degree credible. But when was any ſuch fact atteſted by hiſtorians? If the author thinks the ſtory incredible, I think it as incredible that any good hiſtorian ſhould relate it: if he thinks it incredible, becauſe it is a miracle, I think it incredible that God ſhould work ſuch a miracle for nothing.

* P. 200.

But

But the importance of miracles is, it ſeems, with the author, a thing of no conſideration: this, which we conſidered as a circumſtance that gives the higheſt credibility to the Goſpel miracles, is, at laſt, the very reaſon why he rejects them as incredible. "I beg," ſays he, "that the limitation here made may be re-"marked, when I ſay, that a miracle can never "be proved, ſo as to be a foundation of a ſy-"ſtem of religion; for I own, that, otherwiſe, "there may poſſibly be miracles, or violations "of the uſual courſe of nature, of ſuch a "kind, as to admit of proof from human teſti-"mony, tho' perhaps it will be impoſſible to "find any ſuch in all the records of hiſtory *." This conceſſion is very remarkable, and appears to me to be fairly giving up the argument: for, if miracles may be wrought in caſes of leſs moment, why may they not in greater? or, is religion the laſt and leaſt of all things in the opinion of this author? I confeſs myſelf at a loſs to gueſs what can be his intention in this place. If, in compromiſe for the other miracles which he here grants us unaſked, he expects us to give up all that have religion for

* P. 199.

their object, it will indeed anſwer his purpoſe very well. He may grant other miracles poſſible, and yet make good his argument againſt them. But theſe are not ſo eaſily dealt with. The ſureſt way not to believe them is not to examine them. And this he wiſely recommends as the beſt expedient that has been tried againſt them. "If a miracle," ſays he, "be "aſcribed to any new ſyſtem of religion, men, "in all ages, have been ſo much impoſed on "by ridiculous ſtories of that kind, that this "very circumſtance would be a full proof of a "cheat, and ſufficient, with all men of ſenſe, "not only to make them reject the fact, but "even reject it without farther examination *." This, indeed, is a ſhort way with religion and miracles; and we muſt own, that the author hath found out at laſt a deciſive argument againſt them.

* P. 200.

PART II.

LITTLE as it is that the author has done in the firſt part of his Eſſay, he ſeems to think it more than enough, and that half his pains might have been ſpared: "In the "foregoing reaſoning, we have ſuppoſed, that "the teſtimony upon which a miracle is found-"ed may poſſibly amount to an entire proof, "and that the falſhood of that teſtimony would "be a kind of prodigy. But 'tis eaſy to ſhew, "that we have been a great deal too liberal in "our conceſſions, and that there never was a "miraculous event, in any hiſtory, eſtabliſhed "on ſo full an evidence *." But, if the author was ſo ſure of his ſtrength, why this *corps de reſerve*, a body of troops that have been for ever harraſſed, and are yet untired, in the ſervice of infidelity?

The firſt of theſe veteran bands is drawn up as follows: "There is not," ſays he, "to be

* P. 183.

" found, in all hiſtory, any miracle atteſted by " a ſufficient number of men of ſuch unqueſ- " tioned good ſenſe, education, and learning, " as to ſecure us againſt all deluſion in them- " ſelves—of ſuch undoubted integrity, as to " place them beyond all ſuſpicion of any deſign " to deceive others— of ſuch credit and repu- " tation in the eyes of mankind, as to have a " great deal to loſe, in caſe of being detected " in a falſhood—and, at the ſame time, atteſt- " ing facts performed in ſuch a publick man- " ner, and in ſo celebrated a part of the world, " as to render the detection unavoidable: all " which circumſtances are requiſite to give us " a full aſſurance in the teſtimony of men *." The reader will allow me to ſuppoſe, that the author has in view, both here and throughout his Eſſay, the *Chriſtian* miracles, which we have been conſidering. Now, the objections here made have been ſo frequently and fully anſwered by the advocates of Chriſtianity, that it is quite piteous to ſee the author, after proclaiming a victory, calling in ſuch poor auxiliaries to his relief.

* P. 183.

As

As to the firſt condition here required, there never was perhaps a fact directly atteſted by ſo many witneſſes as the miracles in queſtion. We have ſtill upon record the expreſs depoſitions of many in the writings of the Apoſtles. The converſion of every ſingle perſon to Chriſtianity was, in truth, a clear and preciſe teſtimony to theſe facts; for this religion was wholly built upon them. Now, beſides the twelve Apoſtles and ſeventy Diſciples choſen to preach the Goſpel, a great number more were converted by the miracles and reſurrection of *Chriſt*. But thoſe that gave this witneſs to the miracles of the Apoſtles were without number. Never was there a doctrine that ſpread ſo ſwiftly through the world, or that gained ſo many preſent and immediate witneſſes to its truth.

The Apoſtles and firſt Diſciples had not, many of them, the advantages of education and learning. But what learning is required to enable men to ſee with their eyes and hear with their ears? The miracles they atteſt were plain facts, the objects of ſenſe. Folly itſelf could not be deceived in them: and ſure folly could never ſo ſucceſsfully deceive. Theſe men, illiterate as they were and void of art or elo-

quence, did what this author, with all his arguments, will never be able to do: they got the better of all the religions in the world about them, and eſtabliſhed their own in different and diſtant countries. They had, therefore, we may hope, ſenſe enough to teſtify what their eyes had ſeen and their hands had handled.

They had not perhaps any great reputation to loſe. But the good name of a poor man is as dear to him as that of the greateſt. If they had no publick character to loſe, they had publick infamy to dread: and this they incurred, not by being detected in a falſhood, but by perſevering in the truth. If it was little that they gave up to follow *Chriſt*, it was, however, all that they had. And what they gained was a negative quantity, and muſt be put to the ſide of their loſſes: they gained hunger and thirſt, toil and labour, watchings and faſtings, ſcorn and reproach, ſcourgings and death. They loſt, then, enough to evidence their ſincerity. They gave every proof, that ever was given by man, to the truth of their teſtimony.

As to the notoriety of the facts, they were done in the moſt publick manner—in places of conſtant reſort — many of them in *Jeruſalem*, at times of the greateſt concourſe: and, what is more, they were done in direct oppoſition to the prejudices of all that ſaw them — before the moſt vigilant and powerful enemies, who did not, as this author tells us wiſe men commonly do, "think the matter too inconſiderable to de-"ſerve their attention *," but exerted their utmoſt induſtry and authority in ſuppreſſing this new religion; putting its head and leader to death, ſuborning falſe witneſſes to diſcredit him and his miracles, and proceeding immediately, by impriſoning ſome, and killing others, to deter and diſperſe his followers. Theſe miracles, therefore, were wrought in the very place where their detection was moſt certain and unavoidable; and the teſtimony given to them was given in the ſame publick manner and in the ſame place.

The author is well aware, that the teſtimony of the Apoſtles and firſt Chriſtians, if the miracles were falſe (I mean, the fact of giving ſuch

* P. 198.

teſtimony)

teſtimony) and the miraculous events that followed in conſequence of them, will be thought, upon reflection, at leaſt as incredible as the miracles themſelves: and therefore, to abate our wonder on this head, he obſerves, "ſecondly, "that there is a principle in human nature, "which, if ſtrictly examined, will be found "to diminiſh extremely the aſſurance we might "have from human teſtimony in any kind of "prodigy. The maxim, by which we com-"monly conduct ourſelves in our reaſonings, "is, that the objects of which we have no ex-"perience reſemble thoſe of which we have— "that what we have found to be moſt uſual is "always moſt probable. But, tho', in pro-"ceeding by this rule, we readily reject any "fact that is unuſual or incredible in an ordi-"nary degree, yet, in advancing farther, the "mind obſerves not always the ſame rule; but, "when any thing is affirmed utterly abſurd and "miraculous, it rather the more readily admits "ſuch a fact upon account of that very cir-"cumſtance which ought to deſtroy all its au-"thority. The paſſion of ſurprize and wonder "ariſing from miracles, being an agreeable "emotion, gives a ſenſible tendency towards

"the

" the belief of thoſe events from which it is " derived *."

The love of novelty is, indeed, a natural paſſion; it is no other than the love of knowledge, which God hath implanted in the mind for the wiſeſt reaſons: and for the ſame reaſons we may be aſſured that he hath not laid ſnares to betray us into error, and much leſs hath placed in us a principle, as the author here ſuppoſes, the tendency of which is to make us believe things, merely becauſe they are incredible. " With what greedineſs," ſaith he, " are the miraculous accounts of travellers re- " ceived, their deſcriptions of ſea and land " monſters, their relations of wonderful ad- " ventures, ſtrange men, and uncouth man- " ners!" It is true that every new diſcovery gratifies our love of knowledge, and gives pleaſure to the mind: but it muſt have the appearance of truth to do ſo. Tho' we love to be informed, we do not love to be deceived. A ſingle miracle would riſk the credit of the beſt-eſteemed travels. But, according to this author's principle, the voyage to *Lilliput* or

* P. 184.

Laputa

Laputa muſt meet with more credit than that of *Anſon* or *Ellis*.

But, if the love of novelty will not reconcile us to miracles, that of religion will make us believe any thing. "If the ſpirit of "religion joins itſelf to the love of wonder, "there is an end of common ſenſe *." If the author means, that men are more apt to believe miracles in the cauſe of religion than in any other caſe, he is ſo far in the right. Where ſhould men expect or believe miraculous interpoſitions, but where it is moſt worthy of God to interpoſe? But it does not follow, that religion is a friend to falſe miracles, or an enemy to common ſenſe. On the contrary, right notions of the divine nature and perfections, which religion teaches, are a neceſſary help to diſtinguiſh true miracles from falſe. Now, the *Jews*, in general, were better inſtructed in theſe points than the wiſeſt of the Heathens. The men of *Athens* were far more ſuperſtitious than the moſt ignorant of the *Hebrews*. The falſe wonders of magick, witchcraft, and necromancy, theſe were taught by

* P. 185.

their

their law to hold in contempt, and, conſequently, were leſs liable to be practiſed upon by appearances of this ſort. And, of the Apoſtles and firſt Chriſtians, it is certain, that they had all the ſecurity againſt deluſion and error of this kind, that a rational piety and the nobleſt ſentiments of God and a Providence could give them.

But "a religioniſt may be an enthuſiaſt, and "imagine he ſees what has no reality: he may "know his narration to be falſe, and yet per-"ſevere in it, with the beſt intentions in the "world, for the ſake of promoting ſo holy a "cauſe: or, even where this deluſion has no "place, vanity, excited by ſo ſtrong a tempta-"tion, operates on him more powerfully than "on the reſt of mankind in any other circum-"ſtances, and ſelf-intereſt with equal force: "his auditors may not have, and commonly "have not, ſufficient judgment to canvas his "evidence; what judgment they have they re-"nounce upon principle in theſe ſublime and "myſterious ſubjects *." Here, it is confeſſed, the author has touched upon a very powerful

* P. 185.

and

and fruitful ſource of error. Men, whoſe paſſions are ſtronger than their reaſon, will be guilty of exceſs in religion as well as in other things. A zeal for opinions frequently makes men conclude their own cauſe to be the cauſe of God; and, from wiſhing that Heaven may declare in their favour, they are eaſily led to believe ſuch interpoſitions upon the ſlighteſt teſtimony. But, tho' this principle will make men believe falſe miracles, it will not overpower their ſenſes, or make them ſee what has no reality. The *French* prophets were extravagant enough to expect that one of their principal teachers would come to life again; but, with all their enthuſiaſm, none could believe that he ſaw this miracle: on the contrary, this diſappointment opened their eyes, and the pretence to miracle ruined their cauſe. Nor can I allow, with the author, that men of the beſt intentions can propagate a known falſhood for the ſake of truth. An honeſt man may be haſty in believing; but he cannot be a deceiver or impoſtor. It is certain, the religion of *Chriſt* diſdains ſuch pious frauds, and his Apoſtles have forbad and condemned them in terms as ſevere as language can expreſs: nor is it a principle in this religion, as this writer would inſinuate

ſinuate, that men ſhould renounce their judgment in inquiries of this ſort: on the contrary, they are injoined carefully to examine the truth of miracles and doctrines, before they believe them.

But, granting the author's principles in their full extent, the miracles of the Goſpel will be no way affected by them: For, firſt, the Apoſtles are free from all tincture and appearance of enthuſiaſm; witneſs the writings which they have left behind them, and that ſyſtem of doctrines and morals contained in them: in their piety nothing over paſſionate, rapturous, or ecſtatick appears, but all is rational, ſober, and temperate: their zeal for their maſter and his religion never tranſports them into complaints or invectives againſt his enemies or their own, or into any ſtrained elogiums or panegyricks upon his character: they recite all that is wonderful in his actions, without exclamation, without vehement aſſeveration, with an undoubting, unguarded ſimplicity, that is highly ſingular and remarkable: their whole conduct, in like manner, was void of oſtentation, ſteady, uniform, and regular throughout: they were not only conſiſtent each with himſelf (which a fa-

natick ſpirit ſeldom is) but all purſued the ſame plan, without varying or change, with the moſt perfect harmony and agreement. And, ſecondly, whatever influence, from paſſion or prejudice, the witneſſes to Chriſtianity were under, this operated the contrary way, and muſt diſpoſe them to reject, rather than receive, the miracles: the Apoſtles themſelves were *Jews*, and zealous of the traditions and cuſtoms of their anceſtors: the other converts, whether *Jews* or Pagans, were prejudiced, as ſtrongly as they could be, by religion, againſt the Goſpel: bigotry and enthuſiaſm roſe up every-where in perſecution againſt it; nothing but reaſon and conviction could induce men to declare for it: every paſſion, every intereſt, and every prejudice perſuaded againſt this belief: and, in fact, every ſingle converſion to it was not barely the teſtimony of an unprejudiced judge, but the teſtimony of an enemy to its truth.

" The wiſe," ſays the author, in another place, " lend a very academick faith to every " report which favours the paſſion of the repor- " ter, whether it magnifies his country, his fa- " mily, or himſelf, or in any other way ſtrikes " in with his natural inclinations and propen- " ſities.

" ſities. But what greater temptation than to " appear a miſſionary, a prophet, an ambaſſador " from heaven? Who would not encounter " many dangers and difficulties to attain ſo ſu- " blime a character *?" Where this character is indeed attended with honour and reſpect, it will be natural for ambitious men to deſire it. But the head and leader of this ſect had been every-where reviled and perſecuted, and was crucified as a malefactor: his followers every-where ſhared the ſame fate. What temptation was there to appear his prophet or ambaſſador? What vanity or ſelf-intereſt was gratified by it?

But thirdly, the author tells us, " it forms " a very ſtrong preſumption againſt all ſuperna- " tural and miraculous relations, that they are " always found chiefly to abound amongſt ig- " norant and barbarous nations; or, if a civi- " lized people has ever given admiſſion to any " of them, that people will be found to have " received them from ignorant and barbarous " anceſtors, who tranſmitted them with that " inviolable ſanction and authority which al- " ways attends ancient and received opinions †."

* P. 196. † P. 186.

This argument we preſume, has been already anſwered. The miracles of the Goſpel were, as we have ſaid, performed where they were moſt ſuſpected. The *Jews* were by no means a barbarous people, and they were freer from ſuperſtition than any other nation in the world. Theſe miracles were immediately canvaſſed with all the ſeverity that the prejudice of enemies could ſuggeſt. Some who were healed of their diſeaſes were ſent immediately to the prieſts, on purpoſe, as it ſeems, that they might undergo the ſtricteſt inquiſition. Others were called before the council, examined, and threatened, and every means tried to refute and ſilence them. This religion did not get ſtrength in the dark, and then adventure itſelf by degrees into the light: it was openly proclaimed, from the firſt, in the temple, and in the ſynagogue, where the *Jews* always reſorted: and, when the Apoſtles had filled *Jeruſalem* and *Judæa* with their doctrines, *Rome* and *Athens* were ſome of the next ſcenes of their miniſtry.

Under this head we are entertained with a long ſtory from the *Pſeudomantis* of *Lucian*. "It was," ſaith the author, "a wiſe policy "in that cunning impoſtor, *Alexander*, who, "tho'

" tho' now forgotten, was once ſo famous,
" to lay the firſt ſcene of his impoſtures in
" *Paphlagonia*, where, as *Lucian* tells us, the
" people were extremely ignorant and ſtupid,
" and ready to ſwallow even the groſſeſt de-
" luſion. People at a diſtance, who are weak
" enough to think the matter at all worth
" inquiry, have no opportunity of receiving
" better information. The ſtories come mag-
" nified to them by an hundred circumſtances.
" Fools are induſtrious to propagate the delu-
" ſion; while the wiſe and learned are con-
" tented, in general, to deride its abſurdity,
" without informing themſelves of the parti-
" cular facts, by which it may be diſtinctly
" refuted. And thus the impoſtor above-men-
" tioned was enabled to proceed, from his ig-
" norant *Paphlagonians*, to the inliſting votaries
" even among the *Grecian* philoſophers and
" men of the moſt eminent rank and diſ-
" tinction in *Rome*——nay, could engage the
" attention of that ſage emperor, *Marcus*
" *Aurelius*, ſo far as to make him truſt the
" ſucceſs of a military expedition to his delu-
" ſive prophecies *." But what, if this famous impoſtor never pretended to miracles? It is

* P. 188.

ſaid, indeed, that he had his emiſſaries in diſtant countries, who reported this, among other things, to his honour: but there is no appearance in his hiſtory of his ever counterfeiting or pretending to this power. It was his policy not to hazard his reputation on ſo dangerous an iſſue. Ignorant and ſtupid as his *Paphlagonians* were, it might have been too much for all his art to impoſe falſe facts upon their eyes and ſenſes. He had, by a bold and ſucceſsful cheat of another kind, eſtabliſhed his character among this people, who, *Lucian* tells us, differed from brutes in nothing but their outward form. He had the fortune too to gain the ear of a famous *Roman* general, who, by the ſame author's account, was formed to be the dupe of every pretender. This ſeems to have got him ſome name in *Rome*. But I find none, that deſerved to be called philoſophers, among his votaries. It is certain, that the ſight of a *Chriſtian* or an *Epicurean* diſconcerted all his management. They were always drove from his preſence, having the confidence, no doubt, to deride the prophet and his oracles. Every one muſt believe, upon the repreſentation here made, that the emperor *Antonine* had undertaken the expedition mentioned at the inſti-

gation of this impoſtor, or, at leaſt, had concerted meaſures with him for purſuing it. But the oracle given out by this pretended prophet was voluntary and unaſked, in order, if the event had happened, as was probable, to increaſe his own credit. And, ſuperſtitious as this great emperor and philoſopher was, he did nothing, in purſuance of it, but what the wiſeſt general might have done to humour the ſuperſtition and folly of his ſoldiers, and to inſpire them with a confidence of victory. It no-where appears that he hazarded the leaſt point, or altered any one of his meaſures, in conſequence of it. But, if it were true that this impudent impoſtor had this learned emperor and the ſchools of *Greece* among his admirers, this would only prove how much the wiſeſt part of mankind were enſlaved by ſuperſtition, before Chriſtianity releaſed them from it.

The author adds, as a fourth reaſon which diminiſhes the authority of prodigies, " that " there is no teſtimony for any, even thoſe " which have not been expreſsly detected, that " is not oppoſed by an infinite number of wit- " neſſes; ſo that not only the miracle deſtroys " the credit of the teſtimony, but even the teſti-

" mony deſtroys itſelf. To make this the bet-
" ter underſtood, let us conſider, that, in mat-
" ters of religion, whatever is different is con-
" trary, and that 'tis impoſſible the religions of
" antient *Rome*, of *Turky*, of *Siam*, and of
" *China* ſhould, all of them, be eſtabliſhed on
" any ſolid foundation. Every miracle, there-
" fore, pretended to have been wrought in any
" of theſe religions (and all of them abound
" in miracles) as its direct ſcope is to eſtabliſh
" the particular ſyſtem to which it is attri-
" buted, ſo it has the ſame force, tho' more
" indirectly, to overthrow every other ſyſtem:
" in deſtroying a rival-ſyſtem, it likewiſe de-
" ſtroys the credit of thoſe miracles on which
" that ſyſtem was eſtabliſhed: ſo that all the
" prodigies of different religions are to be re-
" garded as contrary facts, and the evidence of
" theſe prodigies, whether weak or ſtrong, as
" oppoſite to each other *." This argument, he is apprehenſive, will appear too ſubtle and refined: but the only fault of it is, that it has no foundation in truth. The author cannot name a ſingle miracle, that was ever offered as a teſt of any of theſe religions, before their eſtabliſhment, or to authorize any pretended pro-

* P. 190.

phet

phet to teach ſuch religion. *Mahomet* expreſsly diſclaims this power in many places of his *Koran*. It appears from his manner of ſpeaking of it, that he knew what advantage this pretence would give to his cauſe, and even felt the want of it: yet, with all the aſſiſtance that art and power could give him, he durſt not hazard ſo dangerous an experiment. There is a wide difference betwixt eſtabliſhing falſe miracles, by the help of a falſe religion, and eſtabliſhing a falſe religion by the help of falſe miracles. Nothing is more eaſy than the former of theſe, or more difficult than the latter. The author would make us believe that miracles are to be met with in almoſt every page of antient hiſtory: "When we peruſe the firſt hiſtories of all na-"tions, we are apt to imagine ourſelves tran-"ſported into ſome new world, where the whole "frame of nature is disjointed, and every ele-"ment performs its operations in a different "manner from what it does at preſent. Battles, "revolutions, peſtilences, famines, and deaths, "are never the effects of thoſe natural cauſes "which we experience *." But the truth is, they are very thinly ſown in the writings of the heathens. Portents and prodigies I call not by

* P. 187.

that

that name. Theſe are to be accounted for from natural cauſes, or owe their exiſtence to a frighted or diſturbed imagination. Of miracles, properly ſpeaking, there are very few upon record: moſt of theſe are given up, by the hiſtorians who relate them, as vulgar fables, unworthy of belief, and none are ſo atteſted as to make them in any degree credible. Of this the author has undeſignedly given us a full proof in the ſtory which immediately follows:

"One of the beſt-atteſted miracles in all "profane hiſtory is that which *Tacitus* reports "of *Veſpaſian*, who cured a blind man in *Alex-* "*andria* by means of his ſpittle, and a lame "man by the mere touch of his foot, in obedi- "ence to a viſion of the god *Serapis*, who had "injoined them to have recourſe to the emperor "for theſe miraculous and extraordinary "cures *." This, the author ſeems to inſinuate, is as well atteſted as any *Chriſtian* miracle, and may be made as good an argument for the religion of the antient *Egyptians* as any miracle for any religion whatſoever: "Every "circumſtance," ſays he, "adds weight to the "teſtimony, and might be diſplayed at large

* P. 192.

"with

" with all the force of argument and eloquence,
" if any one were now concerned to enforce the
" evidence of that exploded and idolatrous ſu-
" perſtition." The occaſion being ſo tempting, he has tried his hand, and ſhewn us how far this miracle may be parallell'd with thoſe of the Goſpel: " The gravity, ſolidity, age, and probity of
" ſo great an emperor, who, thro' the whole
" courſe of his life, converſed in a familiar way
" with his friends and courtiers, and never af-
" fected thoſe extraordinary airs of divinity aſ-
" ſumed by *Alexander* and *Demetrius* — The
" hiſtorian a cotemporary writer, noted for
" candor and veracity, and, withal, the great-
" eſt and moſt penetrating genius, perhaps, of
" all antiquity, and ſo free from any tendency
" to ſuperſtition and credulity, that he even
" lies under the contrary imputation of atheiſm
" and profaneneſs—The perſons, from whoſe
" teſtimony he related the miracle, of eſtabliſhed
" character for judgment and veracity (as we
" may well ſuppoſe) eye-witneſſes of the fact,
" and confirming their verdict, after the *Flavian*
" family were deſpoiled of the empire, and
" could no longer give any reward, as the
" price of a lye: *Utrumque, qui interfuere, nunc*
" *quoque memorant, poſtquam nullum mendacis*
" *pretium.*

" *pretium.* To which if we add the publick " nature of the fact, as related, it will appear, " that no evidence can well be ſuppoſed ſtronger " for ſo groſs and ſo palpable a falſhood." As to the character of this wiſe emperor, *Sueto-nius*, who has wrote his life, tells us, that he had long before this conceived hopes of the empire, from certain idle dreams and omens, of which he has reckoned up eight or ten, as ridiculous as any in hiſtory: that immediately before this, when he was now proclaimed em-peror by ſome of the legions, and had ſtrengthen-ed himſelf by ſeveral alliances, he condeſcend-ed, notwithſtanding his probity and gravity, to give out a miracle upon his own authority, to make himſelf conſiderable in the eyes of the people; pretending that, in the temple of *Sera-pis*, where he went alone, *de firmitate imperii auſpicium facturus*, one *Baſilides*, who was known at the time to be far diſtant and unable to tra-vel, had appeared to him, offering him crowns and garlands — a certain omen (as he and his courtiers interpreted the word *Baſilides*) of the royal dignity. As for the credit of the hiſtorian, he was no witneſs of the fact, nor, for ought we know, ever converſed with thoſe that ſaw it; and the teſtimony he gives to it does by no

means

means amount to a proof that he believed it himſelf. To what purpoſe, then, is the character he gives us of his veracity, penetrating genius, and incredulous turn of mind? But, if the teſtimony of the hiſtorian be not admitted, the witneſſes, from whoſe teſtimony he related it, were of eſtabliſhed character for veracity and judgment. This, indeed, is to the purpoſe. On this point the whole merits of the cauſe muſt reſt. How, then, is this proved to us? Why, the author ſays *it may well be ſuppoſed*, and the hiſtorian tells us that they perſiſted in the report, when they could gain nothing by the fraud. But how does it appear that they had never received any reward for their verdict? The emperor, tho' he affected not the airs of divinity, yet was well pleaſed with his new title, and, no doubt, was well underſtood to look with a favourable eye on thoſe who contributed to ſupport it. The good uſes to which this miracle ſerved are honeſtly told us both by *Suetonius* and *Tacitus*: *Auctoritas, et quaſi majeſtas quædam, ut ſcilicet inopinato et adhuc novo principi deerat, hæc quoque acceſſit*, Suet. *Miraculo evenere, queis celeſtis favor et quædam in* Veſpaſianum *inclinatio numinum oſtenderetur*, Tacit. The *Alexandrians* could not

but have an intereſt in gaining the favour of this prince: the perſons cured are ſaid to be *è plebe* Alexandrinâ, probably unknown to theſe witneſſes and to all the *Romans* about *Veſpaſian*: the partiſans of the new emperor were prepared to welcome and improve every thing that looked in his favour: the phyſicians, who were conſulted whether theſe diſorders were curable, declared that they were: Where, then, is the wonder that two men ſhould be inſtructed to act the part of lame and blind, when they were ſure of ſucceeding in the fraud, and of being well rewarded *(as we may well ſuppoſe)* for their pains?

This ſtory is followed by two others, as remarkable proofs of the credulity of mankind, which, having obtained in *Chriſtian* countries, may perhaps be thought more appoſite to the author's purpoſe of diſcrediting the *Chriſtian* miracles. "There is alſo," ſaith he, "a very "memorable ſtory related by cardinal *de Retz*, "and which may well deſerve our conſide-"ration: When that intriguing politician fled "into *Spain*, to avoid the perſecution of his "enemies, he paſſed thro' *Saragoſſa*, the ca-"pital of *Arragon*, where he was ſhewn, in "the

" the cathedral church, a man who had ſerved
" twenty years as a door-keeper of the church,
" and was well known to every body in town
" who had ever paid their devotions at that
" cathedral: he had been ſeen for ſo long a
" time wanting a leg, but recovered that limb
" by the rubbing of holy oyl upon the ſtump;
" and, when the cardinal examined it, he found
" it to be a true natural leg, like the other.
" This miracle was vouched by all the ca-
" nons of the church; and the whole com-
" pany of the town was appealed to for a
" confirmation of the fact, whom the cardi-
" nal found, by their zealous devotion, to be
" thorough believers of the miracle. Here
" the relater was alſo contemporary with the
" ſuppoſed prodigy, of an incredulous and
" libertine character, as well as of great ge-
" nius — the miracle of ſo ſingular a nature
" as could ſcarce admit of a counterfeit——
" and the witneſſes very numerous, and all
" of them, in a manner, ſpectators of the
" fact of which they gave their teſtimony:
" and what adds mightily to the force of the
" evidence, and may double our ſurpriſe on
" this occaſion, is, that the cardinal himſelf,
" who relates the ſtory, ſeems not to give

" any

" any credit to it, and, conſequently, cannot " be ſuſpected of any concurrence in the holy " fraud *." The ſtory is, indeed, remarkable, as the author has told it. Firſt, the relater was *a cardinal and a man of great genius*; and, tho' he had never ſeen the wooden leg, yet he ſatisfied himſelf that the man had now *two natural legs, like another man.* It does not, indeed, appear, that he examined all or any of the canons, or that he diſcourſed with any body in town about it: but he found, *by the devotion of the people*, that they believed the man to have had a wooden leg. Then the cardinal was a man of a libertine character, *and, which is ſtill more wonderful, and adds mightily to the evidence, he did not believe the ſtory himſelf.* This climax of evidence and wonder ſtill riſing upon us is very extraordinary. The relater of the ſtory was a *cardinal*, and therefore a good evidence of a *Romiſh* miracle: he was of *a libertine character*, and therefore had the better right to be believed; but, what puts the evidence out of queſtion, *he did not believe the ſtory himſelf*; which, again, is *doubly ſurprizing*, as the author obſerves, becauſe he was naturally *of an incre-*

* P. 193.

dulous

dulous temper. This is the firſt ſtory. The ſecond deſerves a more ſerious attention.

" There, ſurely, never was ſo great a num-
" ber of miracles aſcribed to one perſon, as
" thoſe which were lately ſaid to have been
" wrought in *France* upon the tomb of *Abbé*
" *Pâris*, the famous *Janſeniſt*, with whoſe
" ſanctity the people were ſo long deluded.
" The curing of the ſick, giving hearing to
" the deaf and ſight to the blind, were every-
" where talked of as the uſual effects of that
" holy ſepulchre. But, what is more extra-
" ordinary, many of the miracles were im-
" mediately proved, upon the ſpot, before
" judges of unqueſtioned integrity, atteſted by
" witneſſes of credit and diſtinction, in a
" learned age, and on the moſt eminent the-
" atre that is now in the world. Nor is this
" all: a relation of them was publiſhed and
" diſperſed every-where: nor were the *Jeſuits*,
" tho' a learned body, ſupported by the civil
" magiſtrate, and determined enemies to thoſe
" opinions in whoſe favour the miracles were
" ſaid to have been wrought, ever able di-
" ſtinctly to refute or detect them. Where
" ſhall we find ſuch a number of circum-

" ſtances agreeing to the corroboration of one
" fact? And what have we to oppoſe to ſuch
" a cloud of witneſſes, but the abſolute im-
" poſſibility or miraculous nature of the events
" which they relate? And this, ſurely, in the
" eyes of all reaſonable people, will alone be
" regarded as a ſufficient refutation *."

The author has here aſſerted many things that he will not be able to ſupport. The miracles pretended were, many of them, refuted upon the ſpot: a judicial inqueſt was made by the archbiſhop of *Paris* into one of the moſt celebrated, and the cheat was fully detected: the lieutenant of the police brought many to confeſs that the part they had acted was all artifice and pretence; and an ordonnance was hereupon iſſued from the court for apprehending all that were concerned in ſuch frauds: the archbiſhop of *Sens* exhibited a publick charge againſt more than twenty, as palpable and diſcovered cheats: and Mr. *Montgeron*, the profeſſed advocate of theſe miracles, of whom we ſhall have more to ſay hereafter, does not, in his anſwer, pretend to defend a fourth part of theſe: and the author may ſee

* P. 195.

his

his defence of theſe, and of all the other miracles he defends, *diſtinctly refuted* in the *Critique générale* of Mr. *Des Vœux*. The moſt uſual effects of this ſepulchre were not cures, but diſtempers — a ſort of convulſions, which ſeized alike the ſound and the ſick, and were attended with ſuch ſtrange appearances as brought great contempt and ridicule upon the other miracles of this ſaint. Theſe convulſions, we are told by ſkilful phyſicians, are eaſily counterfeited, and, from being counterfeited, frequently become real and habitual: they are too ſo communicable, by a ſort of ſympathy, to perſons of weak nerves, that this diſtemper, it is well known, is for this reaſon excluded ſome of our great hoſpitals; it having been found that, when one is ſeized, it ſpreads, like infection, thro' a whole ward. This will account for the great numbers who are ſaid to have felt this extraordinary effect from viſiting the *Abbé*'s tomb.

I deny not that there were real cures wrought upon the ſick that were brought there: but the ſame, I dare pronounce, would happen, if a thouſand people, taken at a venture, were at any time removed from their ſick cham-

bers in *London* to *St. Paul's Churchyard* or the *Park*, eſpecially, if they went with any ſtrong hope of a cure: in ſuch a number, ſome are always upon the point of recovery —— many only want to fancy themſelves well—others may be flattered for a time into this belief, while they are ill——and many more, by freſh air and motion, and eſpecially by forbearing the uſe of other means, will find a change for the better: but, that the blind received their ſight, or the deaf were reſtored to hearing, by theſe viſits, I deny that we have any competent or tolerable evidence. This ſanguine writer does, indeed, take upon him to anſwer for *the credit of the witneſſes* and *the integrity of the judges*. But theſe miracles were never proved in a judicial way. The vouchers produced for them are only certificates collected from all ſorts of perſons, who were neither interrogated by judge or council, nor confronted by other witneſſes: they only left their depoſitions or affidavits in the hands of a notary, who was not concerned to examine, or even to know, the perſons who made them, or whether they gave in their own or fictitious names. The credit, therefore, of the witneſſes

witneſſes was never proved by any trial whatſoever *.

Doctor

* In the ſecond edition of the *Metaphyſical Eſſays* there is an additional note to p. 195, &c. in which the author obſerves, that " the *Moliniſt* party had tried to diſcredit theſe miracles in one inſtance, that of Madamoiſelle *le Franc*. But, beſides that their proceedings were the moſt irregular in the world, particularly in citing only a few of the *Janſeniſts'* witneſſes, whom they tampered with: beſides this, I ſay, they ſoon found themſelves overwhelmed by a cloud of new witneſſes, one hundred and twenty in number, moſt of them perſons of credit and ſubſtance in *Paris*, who gave oath (*—for what? not for the miracle in queſtion, but*) for the miracles."

The pretended cure of *Anne le Franc* was the moſt celebrated and beſt-atteſted of all the firſt miracles of this ſaint; and was, therefore, very fitly pitched upon for examination, in order to give all the advantage to the miracles that could be wiſhed, and to put the trial of them upon the faireſt iſſue. It was tried by a judicial proceſs directed for that purpoſe; and, whatever formalities the author may think wanting in the proceedings, it was ſo clearly convicted of impoſture, that one of the ableſt advocates for theſe miracles, M. *le Gros*, could find nothing to reply in its defence; nor does M. *de Montgeron* himſelf pretend to defend it. It was proved, by five of the witneſſes to this miracle, that the certificates, which they had given into the hands of the notary, and which were counterſigned by Ma-

Doctor *Middleton*, who has likewiſe ſet out the evidence of theſe miracles with great parade, is pleaſed to tell us that " the reality of " them

damoiſelle *le Franc* herſelf, were afterwards falſified, and many material circumſtances added which they had never atteſted: by others, that ſhe was, in great meaſure, recovered before ſhe viſited the tomb; and that many of the diſorders alledged as cured were entirely chimerical: and by others, that ſhe returned from the tomb in the ſame condition that ſhe went there, and ſtill wanted the help of farther medicines: which laſt circumſtance may ſeem confirmed by the non-appearance of *le Franc* herſelf, who was not to be found at the trial.

The author goes on, after celebrating the vigilance, activity, penetration, and extenſive intelligence of Monſ. *Héraut*, then *lieutenant de police*, to obſerve, that " this magiſtrate, who by the nature of his office is al- " moſt abſolute, was inveſted with full powers, on " purpoſe to ſuppreſs or diſcredit theſe miracles; and " he frequently ſeized immediately and examined the " witneſſes and ſubjects of them; but never could " reach any thing ſatisfactory againſt them." But the nature of this magiſtrate's office was ſo far from making him abſolute in the preſent caſe, that it gave him no power at all to examine the truth of theſe miracles. This was the province of the archbiſhop alone, and not to be invaded: accordingly, in the ordonnance of the king, dated *January* 27, 1732, by which Mr. *Héraut* was impowered to arreſt and confine the moſt obſtinate of theſe

" them is atteſted by ſome of the principal " phyſicians and ſurgeons in *France*, as well " as the clergy of the firſt dignity, ſeveral of " whom were eye-witneſſes of them, who " preſented a verbal proceſs of each to the " archbiſhop, with a petition, ſigned by above " twenty curés or rectors of the pariſhes of " *Paris*, deſiring that they might be authen- " tically regiſtered, and ſolemnly publiſhed to

theſe miraculized cheats, after the conviction of *Anne le Franc*, and after he had brought many to a voluntary confeſſion of the fraud, this power is particularly reſerved to the archbiſhop.

Soon after this the tomb was incloſed and ſhut up; but the ſame farce ſtill continued in many parts of the city, ſome hundreds pretending to theſe miraculous convulſions; moſt of them poor girls, who got a livelihood by the buſineſs. So that the author might have ſpared his remark, " No *Janſeniſt* was ever embarraſſed " to account for the ceſſation of the miracles when the " church-yard was ſhut up. 'Twas the touch of the " tomb that operated theſe extraordinary effects; and " when no one could approach the tomb, no effects " could be expected, *&c.*" As he might too his concern for the poor *Moliniſts* that rejected theſe miracles; who were never put, as he repreſents, to the hard neceſſity of accounting for them from witchcraft and the power of the devil, but always reſolved them into their proper cauſes.

" the people, as true miracles *." Any one, who reads this in connection with what goes before it, will be led to believe that a great number of theſe miracles had been confirmed by this verbal proceſs †: but there never were, as far as I can inform myſelf, more than four or five thus proved by order of the cardinal *Noailles*. Whether the petition mentioned was preſented by phyſicians and clergy of the firſt dignity, as the doctor's words ſeem to import, I will not take upon me to controvert: but, in all that I have read, I find only that it was preſented by the twenty-two curés who ſigned it ‡. The doctor might have told us too that it

* *Free Inquiry*, p. 225.

† The verbal proceſs I take to be a narrative of the fact drawn up on the ſpot by a magiſtrate (in the preſent caſe, by a commiſſary appointed for that purpoſe) upon a view of the place and circumſtances, an examination of the parties, and the depoſition of witneſſes.

‡ Mr. *Hume*, in the additional note to page 196, ſpeaking of Mr. *de Ventimille*, who was ſucceſſor to cardinal *Noailles* in the archbiſhoprick of *Paris*, tells us, that twenty-two rectors or curés of that city, whoſe general character, for ſtrictneſs of life and manners, he celebrates very juſtly, but very little to the purpoſe, did,

it was rejected as well as preſented, and the archbiſhop's reaſons for rejecting it, which were nothing leſs than palpable falſhoods and contradictions, legally proved, *par des informations juridiques*, on the witneſſes, and even in the depoſitions taken by order of the cardinal *de Noailles:* he might have told us that thirty of the moſt eminent *Janſeniſt* doctors, who were ſuppoſed to have an intereſt in ſupporting theſe miracles, proteſted againſt the abuſe that was made of them, and publiſhed many good reaſons for not believing them—that, if ſome phyſicians of note pronounced the cures in queſtion to be miraculous, many more, who had better opportunities of informing themſelves, judged the contrary—that one of the faculty publiſhed a treatiſe to account for the phænomenon of the convulſions in a natural way, and ſeveral, who

did, "with infinite earneſtneſs, preſs him to examine "theſe miracles, which they aſſert to be known to the "whole world, and indiſputably certain: but he wiſe-"ly forbore." But it is certain, that this prelate was ſo far from forbearing or declining this taſk, that he cauſed a publick judicial inqueſt to be made into them; and, in an ordonnance of *November* 8, 1735, has publiſhed the moſt convincing proofs, that the miracles, ſo ſtrongly warranted by theſe curés, were forged and counterfeited.

who were conſulted on the other pretended cures, declared the whole to be fiction and impoſture *.

All that was real in theſe phænomena may be accounted for from nature: but a great part was certainly appearance, and owing to art. The *Abbé Pâris*, as doctor *Middleton* has told us, " was a zealous *Janſeniſt*, and a warm " oppoſer of the bull or conſtitution *Unigenitus*, " by which the doctrines of this ſect were ex- " preſsly condemned: he died in 1725, and " was buried in the churchyard of *St. Medard*

* See letter 7th of the *Critique* of Mr. *Des Vœux*. This judicious writer, who is now miniſter of the *French* church in *Dublin*, was himſelf a *Janſeniſt* and an inhabitant of *Paris* at the time when theſe miracles were celebrated. This circumſtance, which adds to the credit of his verdict, doctor *Middleton*, who had ſeen his book, and therefore muſt know it, chuſes to conceal, and to repreſent him only as a *Proteſtant writer*. This may be excuſed. But it is too much to aſſert that " he does not deny the facts, but only endeavours to " make the miraculous nature of them ſuſpected:" for near a fourth part of this book, which conſiſts of nine letters, in two volumes, 12mo, is taken up in diſproving theſe facts, and the title at the head of one of the longeſt letters is *Ou l'on fait voir, par les pieces même que Mr.* de Montgeron *produit, que les faits qu'il publie ne ſont pas vrais.*

" in

" in *Paris*, whither the great reputation of his " ſanctity drew many people to viſit his tomb, " and pay their devotions to him as a ſaint; " and this concourſe, gradually increaſing, made " him ſoon be conſidered as a ſubject proper " to revive the credit of that party, now " utterly depreſſed by the power of the *Jeſuits*, " ſupported by the authority of the court *." Half the city of *Paris*, and many among them of rank, took part with the appellants againſt this bull. The ſaint was, therefore, ſure to have juſtice done him. Moſt of theſe, if they did not believe, yet wiſhed well to his miracles, for the ſake of mortifying the *Jeſuits* and their party.

" But the evidence of theſe miracles is ſtill " preſerved in a pompous volume of Monſ. " *de Montgeron*, a perſon of eminent rank in " *Paris*, who, Dr. *Middleton* tells us, dedicated " and preſented it to the king in perſon, be- " ing induced, as the author declares, by the " inconteſtable evidence of the facts, by which " he himſelf from a libertine and profeſſed " Deiſt, became a ſincere convert to the *Chriſ-* " *tian* faith †." As the credit of theſe boaſted

* *Free Inquiry*, p. 223.

† *Free Inquiry*, p. 224.

miracles

miracles reſts almoſt wholly on this book of Mr. *Montgeron*, the reader will not be diſpleaſed, if we ſtop a little to conſider the character of the work and its author.

This book was publiſhed, as we are adverti-ſed at the beginning, to demonſtrate, among other things, the juſtice of the cauſe of the appellants againſt the bull *Unigenitus:* but it was ſo far from anſwering the purpoſe of reviving the credit of the *Janſeniſts* or their miracles, that from this time they ſunk into greater diſgrace than ever; while the author was caſhiered from his employment, ſent firſt to the *Baſtile*, and afterwards into baniſhment. The author declares himſelf converted to Chriſtianity by the evidence of theſe facts: but it is ſtrange to obſerve, from his own hiſtory of this converſion, that it was wrought without his either ſeeing or examining the evidence of any one of theſe miracles. It appears, from this hiſtory, that the author was early impreſſed with a ſenſe of religion—that, having given himſelf up to a life of pleaſure and debauch, he was, on a certain occaſion, ſo ſtruck with remorſe, as to ſhut himſelf up in a convent, with deſign to ſpend his days in penitence

penitence and retirement—that, returning again to his former life, he endeavoured to free himſelf from the checks of conſcience by reading the books of Deiſts, and perſuading himſelf that religion was a cheat—that the famous bull *Unigenitus*, which juſt then appeared, helped much to confirm him in this belief: But the fears of religion ſtill kept hold of him, and, particularly, on the firſt report of our *Abbé*'s miracles, his conſcience took the alarm, and put him upon inquiring in earneſt into the truth of religion—that, upon hearing a ſecond time of theſe miracles, he reſolved to viſit the tomb, and make a ſtrict inquiry into their truth—that, coming there, he was immediately ſtruck with the ardor that appeared in the devotion of the people; ſtrongly impreſſed with which, he fell himſelf on his knees, and addreſſed a ſhort prayer to the ſaint, beſeeching him, "That, if indeed he ſtill lived, and had any "power with the Almighty, he would pity "his blindneſs, and intercede for him, that "his mind might be enlightened, and the "cloud removed which held him in dark-"neſs!" Upon which, immediately, while he continued ſome hours on his knees, all the arguments for religion, which he had ever heard

heard or read, preſented themſelves to his mind, and paſſed in review before him, with ſuch force and conviction, that he became from that moment a zealous and confirmed Chriſtian. Here, you ſee, the author, without waiting for any miracle, or inquiring into thoſe which he had heard, was not only converted to Chriſtianity, but became a determined believer of all the miracles of this ſaint. And from this ſhort ſketch we may eaſily make out his character, which was plainly that of a wrong-headed and violent man, that could think coolly about nothing, changing, as fancy or temper led him, from one opinion, from one extreme, to another, and governed throughout by paſſion or prejudice, and not by reaſon.

His book was publiſhed ten (or according to Dr. *Middleton*, twelve) years after the *Abbé*'s death; and 'tis a collection of only nine cures, ſelected out of the great number which are ſaid to have been wrought in all this time; the firſt of which I ſhall preſent my reader with, in a few words, as a ſpecimen of the reſt: A *Spaniſh* youth, at the age of ten years, loſt entirely the ſight of the left eye by a violent rheum and inflammation: a few years after, receiving

receiving a blow upon the right eye, he became almoſt blind for ſome days, but, by proper remedies, recovered his ſight again: at the age of ſixteen, this eye was attacked with a fluxion and inflammation like to that which had deſtroyed the other, but was ſoon recovered, by the application of a certain water, ſo far as to allow him for two or three months after to proſecute his ſtudies: but, the diſorder then returning, and the ſame remedy being found ineffectual, he continued in this ſtate, without the application of any remedy, near two months; at the end of which, hearing of the *Abbé Pâris*'s miracles, he reſolved, with the conſent of his governors, who were zealous *Janſeniſts*, to apply to the *Abbé*'s tomb: he entered upon a neuvaine, or nine-days devotion, in honour of the ſaint, and to ſupplicate his aſſiſtance: the effect was, that his pains redoubled, and the inflammation increaſed; but towards the end of the term theſe bad ſymptoms abated, and his eye at laſt became ſtrong enough to bear the light, and to permit him to return to his ſtudies: and all this without the uſe of any other means than ſaving the eye from reading for three months, ſhutting out the light, and bathing it the two laſt days with a little decoction of mallow-roots

with laudanum, preſcribed by an oculiſt; and this too owed all its virtue to the manner of applying it, which was not with a common linen rag, but a piece of the ſhirt in which the *Abbé* died, and ſome of the earth in which he was buried. A certain *Janſeniſt* phyſician, who ſaw this eye two days before the cure, judging it to be a diſorder of the optick nerve, expreſſed ſome doubt whether it were curable, and, being told afterwards that no human means had been uſed, inclined to think the cure miraculous. This, I ſuppoſe, is one of the principal phyſicians, who, Dr. *Middleton* tells us, atteſted the truth of theſe miracles. But it is certain that many other phyſicians and oculiſts, both in *France* and *Spain*, thought otherwiſe, and preſcribed bleeding, bathing, and the uſe of different medicines for it. The left eye, in the mean time, remained in its former ſtate, uncured; and the eye which was healed relapſed ſome time after, and was again cured by bleeding. This is the firſt miracle, as it is related by this author, and atteſted by many vouchers and certificates printed along with it — a ſtory too contemptible for argument or remark. But, if the reader deſires to ſee the falſe colouring in which the writer has dreſſed it, and the

inconſiſtencies and prevarication of the witneſſes detected, he may find this done, to his entire ſatisfaction, in the letters above-mentioned, and in the nineteenth and twentieth tomes of the *Bibliotheque raiſonée*; from which, and Mr. *Vernet's Traité de la Verité de la Religion Chretienne*, moſt of theſe remarks are taken.

The evidence then, for theſe miracles, tho' ſet out with ſo much eloquent pomp, when examined, is found to amount to very little. But this is acknowledged, that the credulity of mankind is very fully proved by this and the other legendary miracles of Popery, and that hence an argument of ſeeming weight ſtill lies againſt the miracles of the Goſpel: for, if ſo many other miracles have been believed raſhly and without reaſon, it is poſſible that theſe may likewiſe have been received upon incompetent teſtimony: and, if this be poſſible, muſt it not alſo be allowed more probable, than that events ſo ſtrange and contrary to the common courſe of nature ſhould be true? This is the inference, we may preſume, the author would have us make from the ſtories he hath related; and this objection he has incidentally dropped in ſeveral parts of his Eſſay: "The many in-

" ſtances of forged miracles, and prophecies,
" and ſupernatural events, which, in all ages,
" have either been detected by contrary evi-
" dence, or which detect themſelves by their
" abſurdity, mark ſufficiently the ſtrong pro-
" penſity of mankind to the extraordinary and
" the marvellous, and ought reaſonably to be-
" get a ſuſpicion againſt all relations of this
" kind *:" And again, in the place above cited, " Should a miracle be aſcribed to any
" new ſyſtem of religion, men in all ages have
" been ſo much impoſed on by ridiculous ſtories
" of that kind, that this very circumſtance
" would be ſufficient, with all men of ſenſe,
" not only to make them reject the fact, but
" even reject it without farther examina-
" tion †." As this is one of the moſt ſpecious and prevailing arguments againſt the miracles of religion, it will deſerve a diſtinct anſwer.

To the firſt conſequence, then, which the author here draws from the credulity of men, I readily agree — That miracles and facts of an extraordinary nature may be juſtly ſuſpected, 'till ſufficient evidence of their reality is pro-

* P. 186. † P. 200.

duced,

duced, and ought never to be received, 'till after a previous examination had into this evidence. But, that all miracles ſhould be rejected without examination, becauſe a great number have been forged, is, ſure, a moſt illogical concluſion. The truth of the Goſpel miracles does not imply that all the miracles upon record are true: how then does the falſhood of other miracles affect the truth of theſe? If ſome men are cheats and impoſtors, is there no truth in the world? If ſome have believed upon too ſlight evidence, muſt we, therefore, reject all teſtimony, and diſbelieve or doubt about every thing? Is the currency of bad coin a proof that there is none good? The teſt and aſſay will always diſtinguiſh the true from the falſe: and it is our own fault, if we are impoſed upon by counterfeits. God hath given us reaſon and underſtanding to know good and evil, truth and falſhood, and, in all things pertaining to life or duty, hath made the difference between them ſufficiently clear and diſcernible. If he ſpeaks to us by miracles, he will, doubtleſs, cauſe his voice to be known, and give full evidence of his authority. To thoſe, who are not preſent witneſſes of his power, this evidence will be tranſmitted with ſuch teſtimony as cannot be im-

peached — ſuch as will ſtand every fair and equitable trial. With ſuch teſtimony, we aſſert, the Scripture miracles are delivered down to us. Let them be brought to the trial, and, if they are found wanting, be rejected; but not be condemned, as this ſupercilious writer would have them, unheard.

I obſerve, that this author, in common with many others, ſeems to think every proof of the credulity of mankind a ſort of argument againſt the evidence of the Goſpel: they think this ſufficient to account for the belief of all miracles, and that it is, therefore, needleſs and folly to look for any evidence in their favour: "When "ſuch reports fly about, the ſolution of the "phænomenon is obvious; and we judge in "conformity to experience and obſervation, "when we account for it by the known prin-"ciples of credulity and deluſion. And ſhall "we, rather than have recourſe to ſo natural a "ſolution, allow of a miraculous violation of "the moſt known and moſt eſtabliſhed laws of "nature *?" But I muſt deny that there is any ſuch cauſe or principle in human nature as credulity. If ſome are more credulous than

* P. 197.

others

others—if the ſame perſon be more credulous in ſome points than other— this depends upon other principles: it is a natural effect, and always to be accounted for from natural cauſes. Intereſt, when it is oppoſed by truth, will biaſs the mind to error: ignorance and indolence will diſpoſe men, the one of neceſſity, the other of choice, to follow the judgment of others, and to believe as the world about them does: a deference to authority, whether publick or private — a prejudice to opinions in which we have been educated, or which we have long entertained — has the like effect: where men are, as is frequent, divided into parties by opinion, this prejudice will be heightened by pride and reſentment; they will hearken greedily to every thing that favours their ſyſtem, and be obſtinately deaf to every thing that oppoſes it. Theſe are principles in human nature of great force and extent; and, where they induce to the belief of any thing, there we may ſuſpect credulity, and that men will be prepared to believe, without evidence, even things the moſt difficult of belief. If, in theſe circumſtances, it happen, that not the fact itſelf, but the miraculous nature of it only, is the point that gratifies our wiſhes, there, the greater the miracle is, the

greater are theſe corrupt reaſons for believing it, and, the more ſtrange and incredible it is, the more eaſily ſometimes will it obtain belief: as a ſtone, the heavier it is, and the more unapt to motion, will deſcend the ſwifter, if the plane be ſufficiently inclined, upon which it moves.

But, on the other hand, where theſe or ſuch-like principles have no influence, truth will be fairly heard, and the faith of men will be generally proportioned to the evidence that appears: and, where men believe and maintain opinions contrary to the influence of theſe principles, it is a fair preſumption that their faith is well grounded, and that their aſſent is extorted by the force of truth. The principles, therefore, of credulity will by no means account for all belief alike. Tho' a ſtone will deſcend by its own weight, it does not follow that it can move itſelf upon even ground; and, if it be ſeen, contrary to its natural gravity, to aſcend a ſteep acclivity, we are ſure that there muſt be ſome competent power to impell it. Where miracles are wiſhed for or wanted, the ſtrangeſt and moſt unſupported may be believed: but, in other circumſtances, the miraculous nature

ture of the fact will hang as a weight upon it, and retard its progreſs; and, if it make its way, in oppoſition to the wiſhes, paſſions, and prejudices of mankind, there muſt be truth and evidence to ſupport it.

I have already aſſerted that it required a ſtronger faith and more credulity to believe the evidence of the Goſpel falſe, than to believe the miracles true. All the principles that can make men credulous conſpired to make the firſt Chriſtians diſbelieve the Goſpel. It was not, therefore, credulity, but conviction, which wrought this belief in them. But theſe principles very naturally account for the miracles of the *Romiſh* church. Intereſt, authority, and all the powers of enthuſiaſm, ſuperſtition, and prejudice, forward the belief of theſe: the power of the church is ſupported by them, and the countenance of the church, in the opinion of the believer, gives certainty and infallibility to them.

The diſparity, then, betwixt theſe and the Goſpel miracles is infinite. The end for which the Scripture miracles were wrought is the greateſt that can be thought of, and the teſti-

mony by which they are ſupported is confirmed by the ſureſt teſt of truth. If miracles, therefore, are in any caſe credible, they are in this; if teſtimony is in any caſe to be relied on, it is in this. But what are the ends propoſed or anſwered by the miracles of Popery? More offerings are, perhaps, brought to the ſhrine at *Loretto*, more gain is made of the relicks of the ſaints. But are any nations brought to the faith, or is any ſingle infidel converted, by them? Then, the teſtimony which vouches them is implicitly received, and the veracity of the witneſſes confirmed by no proof or trial. There is no one condition here to make miracles credible——no one cirumſtance to credit the evidence that ſupports them. There is, therefore, no conſequence to be drawn from theſe to the miracles of the Goſpel.

And the ſame obſervation will hold, tho' not with equal force, of the miracles recorded in the church before the times of Popery: there were not the ſame antecedent reaſons for working them, nor the ſame great conſequences attending them: and when were any called, at the hazard of their fortunes and lives, to atteſt them? We are not, therefore, to be alarmed,

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if the truth of theſe miracles is ſometimes brought in queſtion, or even if many of them ſhould be proved to be falſe; ſince the miracles of *Chriſt* and his Apoſtles are no way affected by this, and the Goſpel wants no miracles, but its own, to ſupport it: nor, indeed, can we do a greater injury to the cauſe of Chriſtianity, than to parallel theſe, even ſuppoſing them true, with the canonical miracles of Scripture; ſince, tho' both may be equally true, yet the evidence upon which we receive them, and, conſequently, the reaſons for believing them, are not equal, but the one, in its weight and force, infinitely tranſcends the other. Nor is it any reproach to Chriſtianity, or any juſt cauſe of offence to pious Chriſtians, if the fathers of the church, men juſtly celebrated for their piety and virtue, and even for their learning and abilities, are found to have given too eaſy credit to theſe miracles. Learning and piety are no ſecurity againſt errors of this kind. On the contrary, men of this character, as they are often leſs practiſed in the arts of men, and leſs apt to ſuſpect deſign and fraud in others, may lie more open to be deceived. Men may be prejudiced, even by piety and virtue, to ſuch opinions as are thought favourable to piety and virtue, and,

where

where any thing is thought of good tendency, may think it good to believe it. A little acquaintance with hiſtory will teach us, if our own obſervation does not, that men of great abilities and of the moſt upright intentions may be haſty in believing and zealous in ſupporting the belief of fables, eſpecially where the cauſe of virtue or religion is ſuppoſed to be promoted by them.

We may, therefore, retain our veneration for the piety and good works of theſe eminent lights of the church, without believing every thing that they believed: we may believe many of the facts which they have recorded to be falſe, without hurting Chriſtianity, or in the leaſt impairing the evidence of the Goſpel.

I might, under this head, have obſerved that falſe miracles are almoſt a natural conſequence of true, and, therefore their prevalence and reception is rather a preſumption of the exiſtence of true miracles than an argument againſt them. Could we foreſee that a ſeries of miracles would be wrought in any country, and a publick worſhip and religion be eſtabliſhed in conſequence of it, we might preſume that miracles would be

there more frequently pretended and counterfeited than in any other place. True miracles, like true money, will give a currency to falſe; and the authority and character, which they give to thoſe that work them, will excite the crafty and ambitious to imitate them. On the other hand, where no prior miracles are acknowledged, there is leſs temptation to counterfeit this power, and more difficulty of ſucceeding in it. In fact, the falſe pretences of miracles among Chriſtians are no more than might be expected, in conſequence of the truth and certainty of the firſt miracles of Chriſtianity; and, if the number of theſe has been far greater in the *Chriſtian* world than elſewhere, it is an argument that there, if any-where, true miracles have been wrought. The reader will be pleaſed to ſee this argument in the words of Dr. *Middleton:* "The innumerable forgeries "of this ſort, which have been impoſed upon "mankind in all ages, are ſo far from weaken-"ing the credibility of the *Jewiſh* and *Chriſtian* "miracles, that they ſtrengthen it: for how "could we account for a practice ſo univerſal, "of forging miracles for the ſupport of falſe "religions, if on ſome occaſions they had not "actually been wrought for the confirmation of

"a true

" a true one? or, how is it poſſible that ſo
" many ſpurious copies ſhould paſs upon the
" world, without ſome genuine original from
" which they were drawn, whoſe known ex-
" iſtence and tried ſucceſs might give an ap-
" pearance of probability to the counterfeit?
" Now, of all the miracles of antiquity, there
" are none that can pretend to the character of
" originals, but thoſe of the Old and New
" Teſtament, which, though the oldeſt by
" far of all others of which any monuments
" now remain in the world, have yet main-
" tained their credit to this day, through the
" perpetual oppoſition and ſcrutiny of ages;
" whilſt all the rival productions of fraud and
" craft have long ago been ſucceſſively explod-
" ed, and ſunk into utter contempt—an event
" that cannot reaſonably be aſcribed to any
" other cauſe, but to the natural force and
" effect of truth, which, though defaced for
" a time by the wit, or depreſſed by the power,
" of man, is ſure ſtill to triumph in the end
" over all the falſe mimickry of art and the
" vain efforts of human policy *."

* Prefatory Diſcourſe to a Letter from *Rome*, p. 88.

The

The remainder of this Eſſay is little more than a rude inſult on the Scriptures and the *Chriſtian* religion. For fear his readers ſhould miſtake his meaning, and not apply his argument where he intended, the author proceeds, with a ſmiling grimace, to tell us, " that our " moſt holy religion is founded on faith, not " on reaſon; and 'tis a ſure method of ex- " poſing it, to put it to ſuch a trial as it is by " no means fitted to endure." This he pretends to make evident by examining the miracles related in the Pentateuch: " Here," ſays he, " we are to conſider a book preſented to " us by a barbarous and ignorant people, wrote " in an age when they were ſtill more bar- " barous, and, in all probability, long after the " facts it relates, corroborated by no concurring " teſtimony, and reſembling thoſe fabulous ac- " counts which every nation gives of its origin. " Upon reading this book we find it full of pro- " digies and miracles: it gives an account of a " ſtate of the world and of human nature en- " tirely different from the preſent—of our fall " from that ſtate—of the age of man extended " to near a thouſand years—of the deſtruction " of the world by a deluge—of the arbitrary " choice of one people as the favourites of hea-

" ven, and that people the countrymen of the " author—of their deliverance from bondage by " prodigies the moſt aſtoniſhing imaginable: I " deſire any one to lay his hand upon his heart, " and, after ſerious conſideration, declare, whe- " ther he thinks that the falſhood of ſuch a " book, ſupported by ſuch a teſtimony, would " be more extraordinary and miraculous than " all the miracles it relates; which is, however, " neceſſary to make it be received, accord- " ing to the meaſures of probability above eſta- " bliſhed *."

If the *Jews* were thus more than barbarous at the time when theſe books were wrote, whence, without a miracle, could they learn all the great truths relating to the being and attributes of God, which the moſt learned part of the world were for many ages after in total ignorance about? Whence could the religion and laws of this people ſo far exceed thoſe of the wiſeſt Heathen, and come out at once, in their firſt infancy, thus perfect and entire; when all human ſyſtems are found to grow up by degrees, and to ripen, after many improvements, into perfection? The *Jews* had but little commerce

* P. 201.

with

with other nations, and, therefore, did not excel in the literary and other arts of *Greece:* but the ſame Scriptures, which prove that they were earlier in poſſeſſion of the moſt uſeful and ſublime parts of knowlege, ſecured them likewiſe from ever ſinking into that barbarity which the author charges upon them. Let any one compare the book of *Geneſis*, which he treats with ſo much freedom, and which is by many centuries the oldeſt book in the world, with any of the earlieſt heathen hiſtorians—let him compare the pſalms of *David* with the hymns of *Callimachus* or *Orpheus*—let him read the hiſtory of *Joſephus*, who was juſt cotemporary with *Chriſt* and his Apoſtles—and he will incline to judge more favourably of this people.

The great events recorded in this hiſtory have no connection with the argument of miracles, and, therefore, do not belong to this place. But theſe are corroborated by the ſtrongeſt concurring teſtimony that can be deſired to facts that are, moſt of them, older than the uſe of letters itſelf. The traditions of every country ſeem all to point to one and the ſame original. The late invention of arts and ſciences, the foundation of cities and empires, the manner of peopling the world,

and

and the number of its preſent inhabitants, ſeem all to prove that the world had its beginning no earlier than the period aſſigned by *Moſes*, and agree perfectly with the account of the deluge. There are no monuments of antiquity which give room to ſuſpect the world of earlier original. The firſt authors of *Greece* and *Egypt* ſpeak of the chaos, of the abyſs of waters that covered the earth, of man's being formed out of the ground, and of his firſt innocence. From theſe, one of the *Latin* poets has deſcribed the creation, the ſtate of innocence, the gradual corruption of mankind, and the deluge, in a manner very nearly reſembling that of *Moſes*. The memory of a general flood, which deſtroyed the whole race of men and animals, except one family, ſeems to have been preſerved for ſome ages among almoſt all nations. *Lucian* tells us, the tradition among both the *Greeks* and *Syrians* was, that this was a judgment from heaven on the wickedneſs of mankind: he deſcribes the manner of the flood, the ark in which ſome of every kind were preſerved, and many other particulars, juſt as we have them in the book of *Geneſis*. *Plutarch*, alluding to the ſame tradition, mentions the ark, and even the dove that was

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ſent forth to ſee if the waters were abated. A great number of antient authors, who mention the deluge, and give witneſs to the building of *Babel*, the burning of *Sodom*, and many other great events in the *Moſaic* hiſtory, are reckon'd up by *Joſephus*, *Grotius*, and others. The preſent ſurface of the earth, the ſhells of fiſh that are found in midland countries, and even on the tops of mountains, and the remains of land-animals at very great depths in the earth, are ſtill ſurviving monuments of the deluge *. It is almoſt certain

* An univerſal deluge will, I ſuppoſe, be allowed one of the moſt miraculous facts in the hiſtory of the Old Teſtament. The difficulties that on all ſides ſurround it are as great as can eaſily be conceived. And hence many *Chriſtian* writers (among whom is the learned Mr. *Wollaſton*) have thought it ſufficient to believe that this flood was topical, confined to a ſmall part of *Aſia*; and that the genius of the language in which the relation is delivered, and the manner of writing hiſtory in it, will account for all the reſt. But, the more we improve in natural knowledge, the more reaſons we ſee for believing this hiſtory in the literal and largeſt ſenſe. One of the lateſt and ableſt writers upon this ſubject confirms what the beſt natural hiſtorians have obſerved —that the ſhells of fiſh are found in great quantities in all parts of the world—that the *Lapides Judaici*, which are gathered on the top of mount *Carmel*, are evidently the remains of a ſea-animal—that the *Alps* and *Pyrenæan* mountains abound with others——and that there is not a mountain in the world, in which there have been

certain that the world began to be peopled about the plains of *Babylon* and near where the ark is ſaid to have reſted. From the eaſt colonies of men were ſent weſtward: and from thence we can trace pretty diſtinctly the progreſs of arts and ſciences. The long lives of the firſt men are

tolerable opportunities of inquiring, where remains of ſea-animals have not been found: he tells us, that many of thoſe which are found in great abundance in our iſland are natives of other ſeas——that the horns of *Indian* deer are found in great cluſters, and always at conſiderable depths, in many parts of *England*, and ſometimes under a ſtratum of ſea-ſhells: and hence, though writing upon another queſtion, he concludes, "it is "equally certain, that, wherever they are found, "water muſt have at one time overflowed, ſince there "is no other poſſible means of their being brought "there; and, ſince they are found in every part of "the earth, the tops of the higheſt mountains not "excepted, that overflowing of water muſt have been "univerſal." *Hill's Remarks on Phil. Tranſ.* p. 53. Here, then, we have one of the moſt diſputable parts of the Bible-hiſtory confirmed and proved by indiſputable fact and experiment. In the mean time, it muſt be obſerved that the miracles upon which the *Chriſtian* and *Jewiſh* religions were built have an evidence of their own, diſtinct from that of the other parts of this hiſtory; and that, tho' it were allowed that many errors may have crept into the hiſtorical parts of this book, yet the truth of theſe religions, and the faith of thoſe miracles upon which they are built, would remain unſhaken.

ſpoken

ſpoken of by all the Heathens. This fact is ſo far from diſcrediting the *Moſaic* hiſtory, that Monſieur *Paſcal* reckons it a full proof of the fidelity of the author: "This hiſtorian," ſays he, "has brought the deluge, and even the "creation, ſo near his own time, by means of "the few generations which he counts between "them, that the memory of them could not "but be ſtill freſh and lively in the minds of all "the *Jewiſh* nation." In the line of tradition there are but five ſteps betwixt *Moſes* and the firſt man. "Therefore, the creation and the "deluge are indubitably true. This argument," ſays he, "muſt be acknowledged for concluſive "by thoſe who apprehend its proceſs *." The longevity of men in the firſt ages ſeems neceſſary for the better peopling the world, the invention and improvement of arts, and for propagating religious and all uſeful knowledge, when they depended wholly on tradition. And I am perſuaded that this author cannot even invent a more probable or rational account of peopling the world than this which he affects to deride.

The other inſinuations, which he has thrown out to diſcredit theſe books, have been ſo often refuted, that it is tedious to go over them again.

* *aſcal's Thoughts*, p. 86.

The authority of an hiſtorian is not, ſure, the worſe for his being the countryman of thoſe whoſe hiſtory he writes. The character of *Moſes* is remarkably free from all partiality to himſelf and his countrymen: he faithfully records all the obſtinacy and perverſe behaviour of the latter, and frequently reproaches them with it in the ſevereſt terms: he ſpares not his own failings, or thoſe of his neareſt friends, and omits many things, which are recorded by others, to his honour: the future government of the *Iſraelites* he left not to his own tribe, but to that of *Judah*, and, in the appointment of his immediate ſucceſſor, had no regard to his own family, but left them undiſtinguiſhed and mixed with the common *Levites*.

As to the arbitrary preference of this people, a diſtinction in religious privileges is perfectly agreeable to the analogy of God's diſpenſations to mankind, both natural and moral. But the *Jewiſh* diſpenſation ought not to be conſidered apart, but in connection with the *Chriſtian*, in which it ended. Theſe are but different parts of one and the ſame ſcheme, which naturally illuſtrate and confirm each other's authority. "And, from this view of them," ſays Dr. *Middleton*, "we ſee the weakneſs of that objection

" commonly made to the *Moſaic* part, on the " account of its being calculated for the uſe only " of a peculiar people; whereas, in truth, it " was the beginning of an univerſal ſyſtem, " which, from the time of *Moſes*, was gradually " manifeſted to the world by the ſucceſſive " miſſions of the Prophets, 'till that fulneſs of " time, or coming of the *Meſſiah*, when life " and immortality were brought to light by the " Goſpel, or the chief good and happineſs of " man perfectly revealed to him *."

The origin of this people is ſo far from reſembling the fabulous accounts of other nations, that it is quite ſingular, and in all reſpects different from any other. They are a numerous people, ſprung from the loins of one man, and have continued unmixed with the reſt of the world, if we reckon from the time of *Abraham*, when they were firſt marked out by the promiſe of God to his poſterity, near 4000 years—a great part of the age of the world, and approaching very near to the time when it was laſt peopled by the poſterity of *Noah*. Their very exiſtence at this time, taken with all its circumſtances, is a miracle, which gives credit to all the miracles of *Moſes*.

* Prefatory Diſcourſe to the Letter from *Rome*, p. 88.

The books, which record theſe miracles, were certainly wrote ſoon after the facts; ſince the religion, laws, and polity of the *Jews* were wholly built upon them. Theſe books are the great charter by which they were incorporated into a nation. Theſe miracles are the only ſanction which gives authority to the laws they contain. The miracles were wrought in the face of all *Iſrael*, and many of them under obſervation for a long time together. The books, that record them, were of publick authority and daily reſort. It was, therefore, impoſſible, if falſe, that they ſhould obtain credit for a day. The very being of theſe laws is a proof of the miracles connected with them; ſince the latter, if falſe, muſt have diſcovered the falſhood of the former. By appealing to theſe facts, it was put in the power of every one to ſee through, or, rather, it was put out of their power not to ſee through, the impoſture. The memory of theſe facts was not only preſerved in theſe records, but they were written, if I may ſo ſpeak, and recorded in the daily cuſtoms and religious ceremonies of the *Jews*. The *Paſſover* was inſtituted in memory of their coming out of *Egypt*—the feaſt of *Pentecoſt* in token of the law being given upon mount *Sinai* fifty days after—that of *Tabernacles* in remembrance of their encamping in the

deſart—and, in the form of dedicating or offering their firſt-fruits, a ſolemn commemoration was injoined of the ſigns and wonders by which they were delivered out of *Egypt*. The belief, therefore, of the miracles muſt of neceſſity be as antient as their religion; and indeed, without theſe, their religion, government, and even their preſent exiſtence, as a people, would be more miraculous than all the miracles recorded in the Pentateuch.

We are now come to the concluſion of this celebrated Eſſay: "Upon the whole," ſays he, "we may conclude, that the *Chriſtian* religion "not only was at firſt attended with miracles, "but even at this day cannot be believed by any "reaſonable perſon without one. Mere reaſon "is inſufficient to convince us of its veracity: "and whoever is moved by faith to aſſent to it, "is conſcious of a continued miracle in his own "perſon, which ſubverts all the principles of "his underſtanding, and gives him a determi-"nation to believe what is moſt contrary to "cuſtom and experience *."

The author in one of his Eſſays, complains of a want of politeneſs and civility in thoſe who

* P. 203.

defend religion againſt the attacks of the Free-thinkers, " whoſe moderation and good man-" ners," he tells us, " are very conſpicuous, " when compared with the furious zeal and " ſcurrility of their adverſaries *." But who can, without ſome impatience, ſee a religion which he holds ſacred, and which hath eſtabliſhed itſelf purely by reaſon and argument, treated with this open ſcorn and abuſe? Has this author lived in the time of Sir *Iſaac Newton*, Mr. *Locke*, and Mr. *Addiſon?* Can he know that theſe men gloried in the name of Chriſtians, that the firſt of them employed many of his beſt hours in ſtudying and illuſtrating the Scriptures, and that the other two have wrote profeſſedly in the defence of this religion, and yet think himſelf at liberty to treat all that believe it as men that are incapable of reaſoning or thinking? The charge, which he has here brought againſt the advocates of Chriſtianity, is ſo far from being true, that I dare reſt the whole merits of the controverſy upon this iſſue. Let any one read the authors he mentions, *Collins* and *Tindal*, with *Morgan*, *Gordon*, and the later writers in this cauſe, and compare them with their antagoniſts, *Chandler*, *Conybeare*, *Leland*, *Foſter*, and judge on which

* *Eſſays moral and political*, p. 62.

ſide

ſide the temper and moderation lies. And yet, if men claim ſome authority to opinions which have the publick voice on their ſide, where is the wonder or the blame? It is nothing unnatural for men thus ſupported to aſſume a confidence, and to expect ſome deference and modeſty from their adverſaries. But, when men oppoſe eſtabliſhed opinions with an air of authority, and decide againſt the publick—when they profeſs to doubt, and yet dictate, about every thing, and act at once the Sceptick and the Dogmatiſt—this is a character, which, however it may be accounted for, can never be excuſed *.

And

* The author tells us, that, "in all controverſies, "thoſe who oppoſe the eſtabliſhed and popular opinions "affect a moſt extraordinary gentleneſs and modera-"tion, in order to ſoften, as much as poſſible, any "prejudices that may lie againſt them *." But the fact is notoriouſly otherwiſe. In eſtabliſhments of every kind, the party which forms the oppoſition, if they have the liberty to ſpeak out, is uſually the moſt furious and loud in invective. The reaſon is, the moſt furious and vehement ſpirits are the moſt impatient of control, and the moſt forward to oppoſe. A man that is a tyrant in his own temper is ſure to complain of tyranny in his ſuperiors; and a proud man will always think you proud, if you differ from him, whatever authority and whatever modeſty you may have on your ſide. Thus the celebrated author of the *Patriot King* pronounces the moſt candid of all writers to be a *pre-*

* *Eſſays moral and political*, p. 62.

ſumptuous

And I here aſk my reader, whether he has anywhere met with either a more ſceptical, diſputatious turn of mind, or a more imperious, dogmatical ſtyle, than in the writings of this author? It

ſumptuous Dogmatiſt for daring to differ from his opinion, even before it was known. This conſummate writer, not content to ſhine in his own ſphere, aſſumes the nod, and will give the law in metaphyſicks as well as politicks. "I would not ſay," ſays he, "that God "governs by a rule that we know or may know as well "as he, and upon our knowledge of which he appeals "to men for the juſtice of his proceedings towards "them, which a famous divine has impiouſly advanced "in a pretended demonſtration of his being and attri-"butes: God forbid *!" I learn from hence, that the famous divine ſpoken of has the misfortune to have fallen under the diſpleaſure of this author, and that he has a ſovereign contempt for all that do ſo. But, what his offence is, I am ſtill at a loſs to conjecture. I think myſelf certain, that he has no-where ſaid what the author charges him with, "that we know or may "know the rule by which God governs as well as he." He has indeed, ſaid, "that God himſelf, tho' he has no "ſuperior, from whoſe will to receive any law of his "actions, yet diſdains not to obſerve the rule of equity "and goodneſs as the law of all his actions in the "government of the world, and condeſcends to appeal "even to men for the righteouſneſs and equity of his "judgments (as in *Ezek.* xviii.); that (not barely his "infinite power, but) the rules of this eternal law are "the true foundation and the meaſure of his dominion

* *Patriot King*, p. 94.

"over

It is remarkable with what eaſe and alacrity he hath aſſerted the fact before us. But this cavalier manner is familiar to him. He tells us, in another Eſſay, " that the Quakers are perhaps " the " over his creatures *." But what is this more than the author himſelf has ſaid, in terms as free, in the very page that is ſtained with this cenſure? " That God is " not an arbitrary, but a limited monarch, limited " by the rule which infinite wiſdom preſcribes to infinite " power — that he does always that which is fitteſt to " be done — and that this fitneſs, of which no created " power is a competent judge, reſults from the various " natures and the more various relations of things." He adds, " So that, as creator of all ſyſtems by which " thoſe natures and relations are conſtituted, he pre- " ſcribed to himſelf the rule which he follows as " governor of every ſyſtem of being." This, though no candid reader will complain of it, is more crude and perplexed than any thing I remember in the author here arraigned. God does always what is right and fit. But right and fit were not made what they are, when this or any other ſyſtem of beings was made. The fitneſs of every action, the ſame circumſtances ſuppoſed, was always and ever will be the ſame. This rule is eternal and immutable as truth itſelf, and its authority is as univerſal, extending to all beings and to all poſſible ſyſtems of beings; as the author we are ſpeaking of has, with equal modeſty and clearneſs, aſſerted and proved immediately before the paſſage here cited. If he has ſaid, farther, that God appeals to men for the juſtice of his proceedings, he has given his authority for this — an authority which a *Chriſtian* divine muſt

* Demonſtration of the being and attributes, &c. 9th edit. p. 218.

think

" the only regular body of Deiſts in the uni-
" verſe:" And again, " that the leading Whigs
" have always been either Deiſts or profeſſed
" Latitudinarians in their principles, that is,"
ſays

think deciſive. And what doth this amount to more than ſaying that God hath implanted in men a ſenſe of what is juſt, merciful, and good, and that all his diſpenſations are agreeable to our ideas of juſtice, mercy, and goodneſs? Does not the aſtronomer try the works of God by the laws of mechaniſm and geometry, when he pronounces that they are done in number, weight, and meaſure? And muſt we not have ſome meaſure of juſtice, mercy, and goodneſs, when we attribute theſe to the Deity? To ſay that we can ſee the wiſdom of God in his works is not ſaying that we are as wiſe as God himſelf: nor does our ſeeing the fitneſs and equity of his proceedings in ſome inſtances imply that we are competent judges of or can ſee the reaſon of his proceedings in all. As the author has not pointed out the paſſages in the writer he excepts againſt, I can only gueſs this to be the place. But, if he has any-where dropped an expreſſion that may ſeem leſs accurate or proper upon this ſubject, the author might have pardoned it, who confeſſes, in the ſame page, that he cannot expreſs himſelf on this ſubject properly, and that, when our ideas are inadequate, our expreſſion muſt needs be improper. To return: We have here a phænomenon, which, to thoſe who have not ſtudied human nature, will appear altogether ſingular: Lord *B——e* complaining of the impiety, pride, and preſumption of Dr. *Clarke*. Eſtabliſhed opinions and an eſtabliſhed character provoke his reſentment: rather than ſubmit to another, he will contradict himſelf. And this,

I take

ſays he, "friends to toleration, and indifferent "to any particular ſect of Chriſtians *." Now, it is certain that the Quakers profeſs the belief of Chriſtianity as univerſally as any ſect whatſoever. And what right has the author to charge a whole body of men with ſuch flagrant inſincerity? As to the Whigs, the principles of toleration are certainly Chriſtian principles, and do by no means imply an indifference to any ſect, much leſs a coldneſs to religion in general: and, if the beſt Chriſtians are uſually the beſt ſubjects and citizens (which I think an indiſputable truth) I ſhould hope their principles would be no impediment to their faith. I am ſure, however, they have no reaſon to thank this author for his compliment.

They who believe religion muſt think that the cauſe of virtue and the happineſs of mankind are bound up in it: and this will juſtify a

* *Eſſays moral and political*, p. 111.

I take it, is the principle from which moſt of Mr. *Hume*'s philoſophy is derived; to whoſe extraordinary gentleneſs and modeſty that of this writer (to ſpeak in the curious phraſe of the latter) * is but as the poſitive degree to the ſuperlative.

Eſt genus hominum, qui eſſe primos ſe omnium rerum volunt, Nec ſunt.

* *Patriot King*, p. 148.

degree

degree of zeal and ardor in its defence. But what is there to call for or excuſe this ſpirit in thoſe who oppoſe it? If the author be a friend to virtue, which, from his elegance of mind and taſte, I ſcarce can doubt—if he be a friend to natural religion, which a perſon of ſo much thought and reflection ſure muſt be — what principles has he in reſerve for the ſupport of theſe, when Chriſtianity is taken away? The beſt philoſophy, as I have already ſaid, availed but little in reforming the religions or morals of mankind: and, as to the philoſophy of this author, it is, as far as I underſtand it, as ill calculated for this purpoſe as any I have met with *. But, indeed, religion can never be ſupported, or virtue taught, with any force or effect, by the reaſonings of philoſophers. The world will never be governed by metaphyſical ideas of honour and beauty, decency of action, and the fitneſs of things. It is the author's own

* The character of this author's philoſophical writings, which I ſhould not otherwiſe have attempted, may be given in his own words, where he ſpeaks of the *Alciphron* and other works of the ingenious and good Biſhop *Berkeley:* "They admit of no anſwer, and produce no "conviction: their only effect is to cauſe that mo- "mentary amazement and irreſolution and confuſion, "which is the reſult of Scepticiſm." *Eſſays moral and political*, p. 240.

obſerva-

obſervation, that " an abſtracted, inviſible ob-
" ject, like that which natural religion alone
" preſents to us, cannot long actuate the mind,
" or be of any moment in life. To render the
" paſſion of continuance, we muſt find ſome
" method of affecting the ſenſes and imagina-
" tion, and muſt embrace ſome hiſtorical as
" well as philoſophical accounts of the Divi-
" nity. Popular ſuperſtitions," ſays he, " and
" obſervances are even found to be of uſe in this
" particular *." The great thing to be wiſhed, then, for the intereſt of virtue and the good of mankind, is, that the maxims of natural religion ſhould be fixed and aſſured by an authority that is deciſive—that a rule of duty ſhould be taught as the will and law of God — that the ſanctions of this law, a future ſtate and a judgment to come, ſhould be known alike to all, both ſmall and great—that the hopes of pardon ſhould be aſſured to the penitent ſinner —that there ſhould be an inſtitution to propagate this knowledge, and to ſpread it thro' the world—that there ſhould be a publick worſhip ſet up, and a diſcipline and œconomy preſcribed, to train men to piety and virtue: but all this, and much more to the advantage of virtue, we have in the Chriſtian religion.

* *Eſſays moral and political*, p. 231.

Can

Can the author tell us where elſe they are to be found? If he is looking out a cure for ſuperſtition, I venture to aſſure him, that, with all his reſearches into metaphyſicks and morals, he will never find any equal to that religion which he endeavours to explode; which in a few years did infinitely more towards freeing the world from the fear and folly of prodigies, omens, dreams, and oracles, than all the philoſophy in the world had done in many ages. If, unhappily, this religion is ſtill corrupted by ſuperſtitious mixtures, theſe I freely commit to the mercy of the author. But Chriſtianity is not to anſwer for theſe any more than for the other errors and vices of mankind, which, however it aims to correct, it does not pretend to eradicate. And even theſe will be better and more ſucceſsfully oppoſed by fair argument and civility than with inſult and reproach. Where a liberty of debate and free inquiry is allowed, it is unpardonable to inſult the publick that allows it. "There is a degree "of doubt and caution and modeſty, which, "in all kinds of ſcrutiny and deciſion, ought "for ever to accompany a juſt reaſoner *."

* *Philoſophical Eſſays*, p. 250.

FINIS.